St Ippollitts: a village of many spellings

The village name of St Ippollitts, south of Hitchin, is recorded in a bewildering variety of spellings. Historically, the most typical form has been Ippollitts (which is how the English Place-Name Society records it), with a varying number of *p*s, *l*s and *t*s. Occasionally, the initial *I-* has been dropped, so that we also find variations on Polletts. The form Ippolyts has come into vogue in recent years but has no historical authority. If we were to aim for exact etymological accuracy, it would be Hippolyts, although spellings with initial *H-* are recorded only in the seventeenth century.

The name derives from the dedication of the parish church to St Hippolytus. He was a renowned Christian theologian who lived at the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries, dying about 235 after being exiled to Sardinia. He seems to have been elected rival Bishop of Rome to Callixtus I, Urban I and Pontian, whom he attacked for their laxity (Callixtus had extended forgiveness to adulterers, for instance). A later *Passion of St Hippolytus* by a fifth-century writer, Prudentius, includes a story that he was dragged to death after being tied to wild horses. Prudentius's account borrows from the Greek myth of Hippolytus, the son of Theseus, who died this way: the Greek name Ἱππόλυτος means 'destroyed by horses'. Other versions of the legend make him a soldier or a bishop of Pontus: they all refer to the same individual whose life was mostly unknown, giving biographers free rein to invent details.

The legend surrounding his death led to him becoming the patron saint of horses. John Norden stated in his *A Description of Hartfordshire* (published in 1598) that the church '*was dedicate to a supposed Saint of that name, that in his life time was a good tamer of colts, and as good a horse-leach: And for these qualities so deuoutly honored after his death, as all passengers by that way on horsebacke, thought themselues bound to bring their steedes into the church, euen, vp to the high aulter, where this holy horseman was shryned, and where a Priest continually attended, to bestowe such fragmentes of* Eppolettes *myracles, vpon their vntamed coltes, and olde wanton, and forworne Iades, as hee had in store, And did auaile so much the more or lesse, as the passengers were bountifull or hard-handed, but he that was coy of his coyne had but a colde and counterfeite cure*'. Here we see a further extension of the saint's legendary deeds to include a medieval reputation as a horse-whisperer.

The first record of the church – and the village name – was in 1283. The core of the nave and chancel date from the end of the eleventh century, showing that it was considerably older. However, although local tradition suggests that it was built in 1087 as a gift of Judith de Lens (niece of William I and wife of Earl Uhtred of Northumbria), this statement's source is unknown. She allegedly regretted testifying against her husband (which led to his execution) and founded the church as an act of penance. She founded Elstow Abbey about 1078, dying between 1086 and 1090. During the Middle Ages, Elstow Abbey was the patron of St Ippollitts Church, a chapel-of-ease of St Andrew's, Hitchin. However, St Andrew's was granted to Elstow in Henry II's reign (1154-1189), although the Abbey later forged a document claiming that Countess Judith had made the grant. Perhaps the attribution of St Ippollitts to her gift was part of this same fraudulent claim.

The parish

Although the church dates from the closing decades of the eleventh century, it was not founded as a parish church in its own right but as a subsidiary chapel of St Andrew's Minster, Hitchin. Priests from Hitchin served the church until after the Dissolution of Elstow Abbey, which held the churches, in
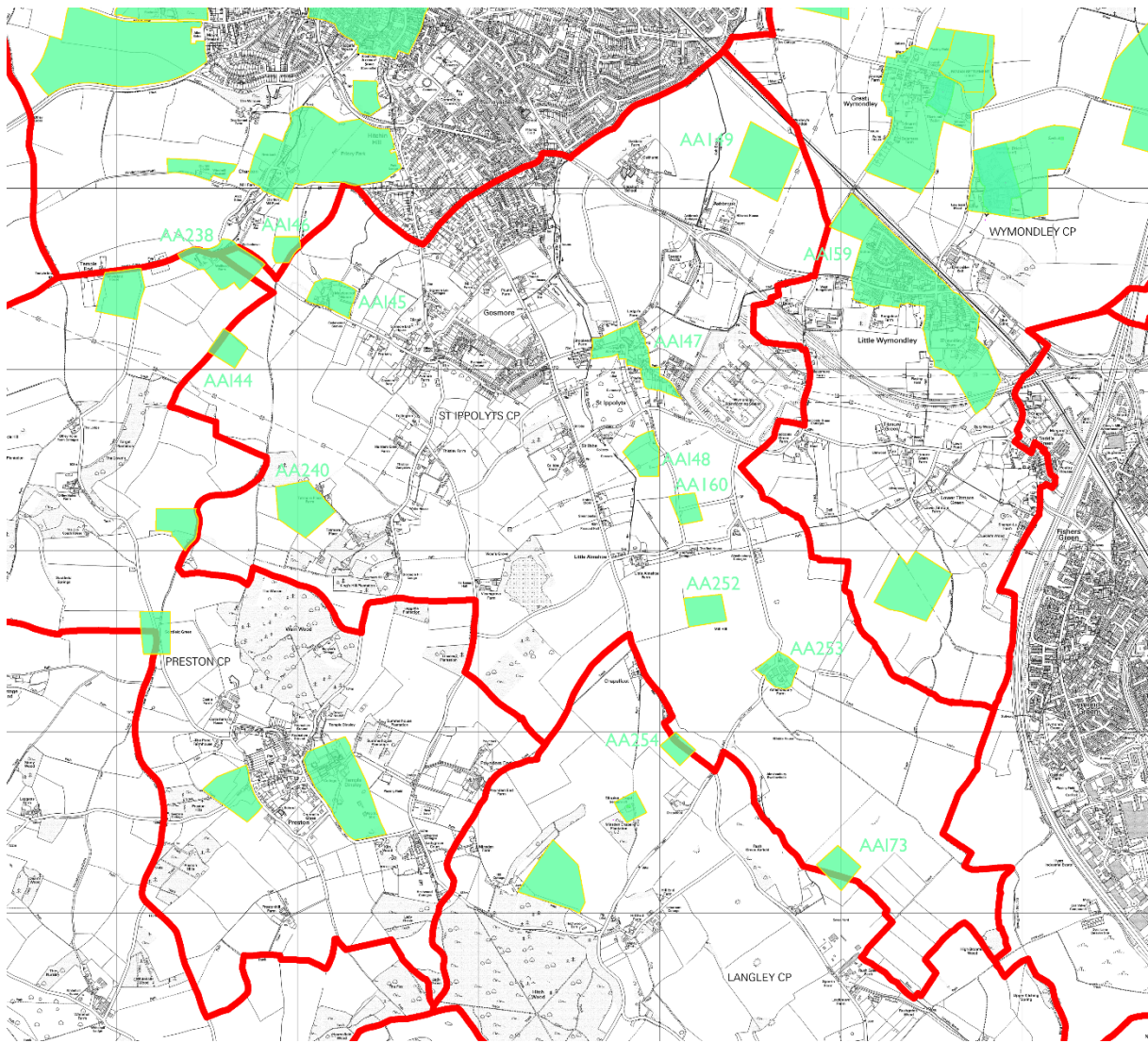
1539. The earliest known vicar, Thomas Clerkot, died in 1448. The vicarage was united with Great Wymondley, another chapelry of Hitchin, on 15 March 1686, so it is not clear if it was yet regarded as a parish in its own right. However, its registers begin in 1625, suggesting that it had gained some independence by then.

There is a possibility that the early parish was considerably smaller than the present civil parish: Dury and Andrews's map of 1766 (Figure 2) shows everything to the west of London Road as still part of Hitchin; this must be an error, as Gosmore was part of St Ippollitts parish as the time of the manorial survey in 1676. To the south, the boundary continued along London Road, so that Rush Green, Dyes Farm and Langley are shown as part of 'Hippolites'; the western part of Langley parish is split between Preston (a chapelry of Hitchin) and St Pauls Walden (a parish in its own right). By about 1830, St Ippollitts extended as far south as Chequers Lane in Preston and included Wain Wood and Poynders End. The remaining part of Hitchin to the south of the town included the hamlets of Preston, Minsden and Langley. St Ippollitts, Dinsley and Minsden had churches that were chapels of St Andrew's mother-church in Hitchin. The present boundary was established when the southwesternmost part was transferred to Preston when Preston and Langley parishes were created in 1894.

The picture is made yet more complicated by the absence of St Ippollitts and Preston from Domesday Book. Almshoe, Langley and Minsden appear as manors in Broadwater Hundred, despite St Ippollitts

Figure 1: the parish of St Ippollitts, showing designated Archaeological Areas

later being in Hitchin Half-Hundred. Dinsley, by contrast, was in Hitchin Half-Hundred. Minsden was already home to a priest in 1086, suggesting that the church was established before then; the earliest surviving masonry probably dates from the fourteenth century. The Domesday Hundred boundary probably coincided, approximately, with that between 'Hippolites' and Hitchin in 1766. Therefore, the present Civil Parish of St Ippollitts cuts across ancient and administratively significant divisions.

These administrative divisions attested in 1086 themselves ignored a yet more ancient arrangement, as shown by the inclusion of St Ippollitts, Great Wymondley and Little Wymondley in the Minster *parochia* of Hitchin. Such ancient *parochiae* seem to have come into existence in the seventh century when local kings and magnates endowed communities in *monasteria*. Although the Latin term gives us the English word 'monastery', we should not think of these early medieval institutions as resembling the great monasteries of the High Middle Ages. They consisted of a large church set within a precinct that included houses for a community of religious and lay members who travelled the *parochia* giving religious instruction to the locals. Many were aristocratic foundations and continued to be staffed by their families for centuries. In this sense, they were proprietorial churches. Perhaps the Hitchin *monasterium* was founded by the rulers of the *Hicce*, who gave their name to the town.

An unusual feature found in chalk downland landscapes is located to the south of Almshoebury. Known as a swallow hole, it is a place where a stream, in this case, a seasonal bourne, disappears underground. This stream emerges further north to become Ippollitts Brook, a tributary of the River Purwell. Occasionally, a pond develops around the swallow hole, when groundwater levels are high. Today, it is a site of geological and biological interest, but we can speculate about how people in the past viewed this locally unique phenomenon.

Placenames

The present village takes its name from the dedication of the parish church. Earlier documents, including Domesday Book, make it clear that the original name of the southern part of the territory was Almshoe. First recorded as *Almeshou*, the second element is Old English *hoh*, referring to a spur of land. The hill at Almshoebury has a concave

Figure 2: Dury and Andrews map of 1766

slope to the west, visible from the south. The first element is less easily identifiable. The English Place-Name Society suggested that it might be a reduction of the personal names Æþelhelm or Ælfhelm, following a suggestion by Walter Skeat. Without early forms, it is impossible to be sure.

There was a domestic chapel at Almshoebury, demolished after 1854 when it was described at a meeting of the Oxford Society Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture. According to the Rector of Knebworth, C B Pearson, it dated from the thirteenth century and although the talk was '*accompanied by numerous drawings*', disappointingly none were published. It is not known if they survive. If his assessment of the building were correct, it would make the chapel contemporary with the core of the timber-framed aisled manor house, dating from shortly after 1246.

Historic maps and aerial photographs show the present Almshoe Bury surrounded by a manorial enclosure with no trace of an associated settlement. This observation raises the question of where most of the manor's population lived: was it dispersed throughout the parish or has the present village been the principal focus for more than a millennium? Domesday Book recorded only three *bordarii* in the manor in 1086, sharing one ploughland, so a dispersed community may be the most likely explanation. Almshoe Bury (or Almshoebury) was the name of the manor house, first recorded as distinct from the territory in 1378; Little Almshoe was first recorded in 1602. To be discussed shortly, other evidence shows that Almshoe was only a minor settlement within the early parish.

Gosmore was first mentioned in 1283 with the present spelling. The name is Old English, containing *gós*, 'a goose', and *mere*, 'a pool'. It means 'goose pool', perhaps the village pond north of the crossroads at the village centre.

Sperberry Hill, first recorded as *campo de Speleburwe* in 1203 has forms with -*l*- rather than -*r*- until the nineteenth century. It is and Old English name, meaning 'hill of speech'. There is one record, in 1475, of Hitchin Half-Hundred being referred to as *Poletts hundred*, confirming that Sperberry Hill was probably the traditional meeting-place of the Hundred.

Maydencroft was first recorded in 1269 as *Medcroft*. The first element is probably Old English *mæd*, 'a meadow', combined with *croft*, 'a small enclosed field', most commonly used for placename formation in Middle English (the High and Late medieval form of the language). It was probably therefore coined after the Norman Conquest. Aerial photographs and Lidar show a series of banks and ditches that are probably elements of the medieval manorial enclosure.

Dinsley is now associated solely with Temple Dinsley in the parish of Preston. However, it formerly encompassed large parts of the present parish of St Ippollitts, probably including the present village. Maidencroft was also known as Dinsley Furnival, owned by Gerard de Furnival in 1269. The name is mostly recorded with -*i*- or -*y*- as the first vowel, and can be derived from Old English *Dynnasleah*, 'Dynne's clearing'. Temple Dinsley was named from the donation of part of the manor to the Knights Templar in 1142.

Wain Wood was first recorded in the fourteenth century as part of the Hospitallers' holdings. The early spellings include *Wayn(g)dene* and *Weyngdene*. The English Place-Name Society suggested that the first element is *weoh*, 'a sacred place, a temple'; this West Saxon form would have been *wig* or *wih* in the Mercian English spoken in Hertfordshire (and which developed, ultimately, into Modern English). A suggestion that the element is more likely *wægn*, 'a wagon', does not explain the early spellings with -*ng*-. It seems to be compounded with -*ing*, 'followers of, family of, belonging to'. The final element is *denu*, 'a valley'. The sense seems to be 'valley belonging to the sacred place'.

The name *Welei*, found in Domesday Book, has long been connected with Wain Wood. This is unlikely and Philip Wray has shown that it is to be identified with Waylay Green. The name was recorded in the twelfth century as *Wedelee* and later as *Weyleye juxta Dynesle*. The first element is probably the same *wig/wih* found in Wain Wood: the intrusive -*d*- may be an Anglo-Norman attempt to render the guttural -*h* sound often written ʒ in Middle English. It would therefore be the *leah*, 'clearing, woodland grove' of the sacred place.

Recorded history

The community's early history is complicated by the lack of a definite village name: when medieval documents mention St Ippollitts, can we be sure that they refer to a settlement or the church? Similarly, when documents refer to Almshoe, are they referring to the manor or a village, perhaps even that we know today as St Ippollitts? By contrast, Gosmore refers to the separate hamlet west of the London and St Albans Road; the community is not recorded before the thirteenth century, and its origin is unknown. However, it was perhaps originally part of the manor of Dinsley, as Maydencroft was formerly known as Furnival Dinsley. The Domesday manor of *Deneslai* was extensive – it was assessed on seven hides of arable and had 20 ploughlands – and was regarded as two separate manors, the High Medieval Furnival Dinsley and Temple Dinsley.

Domesday Book

Almshoe is recorded in Domesday Book as a manor belonging to the Bishop of Bayeux, sublet to Adam. He also held the nearby manors of Graveley and the detached part of Great Wymondley that lay between St Ippollitts and Graveley parishes. It was taxed on one hide of arable and was assessed as having one ploughland. The population was small: only three *bordarii* were recorded, implying only 15 or so people. There was enough woodland to provide pannage for 60 pigs, perhaps about 36.4 ha (90 acres), roughly the size of Wain Wood, now in Preston, but formerly in St Ippollitts. In January 1066, its tax was 30s (£1.50), which had dropped to 10s (50p) when acquired around 1070, and was 20s (£1) in 1086. It had previously belonged to Edmund, a thegn of Earl (later King) Harold; the same man had also held part of *Wilei*. This latter manor is often identified with Wain Wood but was more probably Waylay Green, north of Sootfield Green on Tatmorehills Lane, which follows the boundary between St Ippollitts and Preston.

Dinsley was a royal manor (or pair of manors before 1066), sublet to Geoffroi de Bec. The population was much larger than that of Almshoe: there were 19 villeins with eight ploughlands, seven *bordarii*, seven *cottarii*, six slaves, a Frenchman and a royal *elemosinarius* (almoner). We can suggest that these manors' population was over 200, so most inhabitants must have lived not in Almshoe but in Gosmore, St Ippollitts and Preston, as members of the Dinsley manors. There were two mills, a ploughland of meadow, pasture and sufficient woodland for 300 pigs, perhaps about 182 ha (450 acres). It was liable for £14 a year in tax in 1066 and in 1086. Two freemen held the manors from King Harold II before 1066.

Welei, the third manor with holdings in St Ippollitts, was another royal manor in 1086. Two hides and seven ploughlands were held directly by the king; the population consisted of eight villeins, five *bordarii*, two *cottarii* and four slaves. There was woodland pannage for 300 pigs, the same as Dinsley. Two additional parts of the royal manor were sublet to sokemen. One had a hide of arable with two ploughlands, a population of two villeins, one *bordarius* and nine *cottarii*, with woodland pannage for 50 pigs. The second had half a hide of arable and one ploughland, maintained by a single *cottarius*. The size of the manor shows that it comprised more than Waylay Green alone.

The complexity of the manorial arrangements in 1086 and earlier indicates a long history of estate development. The early estates based on Hitchin had been divided up between various royal retainers long before the Norman Conquest. The treatment of the minster lands as part of the royal holding is an indication that the church was a royal foundation, which matches the tradition that it was created by Offa, King of Mercia 757-796. The fission of secular holdings parallels the establishment of daughter churches, such as St Ippollitt's, in the century or so either side of 1066.

The archaeology

Early prehistory (before *c* 6150 BC)

St Ippollitts lies within the so-called 'Hitchin lake-bed', discovered by William Hill in 1891. Deposits associated with this vanished lake stretch from Oughtonhead Lane in Hitchin to the northwest to Gunnels Wood Road in Stevenage to the southeast and are well-known to geologists at Maydencroft. The lowest lake-bed deposits are light grey clay containing the remains of aquatic plants that include bulrushes and pondweed. The pollen found in it shows cold-tolerant open vegetation, with patches of scrub, with willow and birch woodland. They date from late in the Anglian Glaciation, perhaps 430,000 to 424,000 years ago. The lake probably formed when a stream flowing from the southwest was blocked by moraines or clayey hummocks to the north.

Figure 3: a section through the upper lake bed sediments, revealed at Temple End in November 2016

Deposits higher in the lake sediments are a darker grey and more organic colour, with pollen showing that the birch woodland, which also included juniper, was expanding during the early Hoxnian Interglacial, after about 424,000 years ago. After a dryer period, when the lake dried out, and grassland began to develop, the lake bed filled with water again, with mixed oak and fen woodland around its banks. The lake then dried out once more, and its bed was covered in sands, gravels and clays laid down by a stream flowing from southeast to northwest. These tend to be brownish, with lenses of white or pale grey marl (Figure 3). The total depth of the deposits is around ten metres.

Most of the plant and animal remains from the Hitchin lake bed came from the marl deposits. Animals represented include the straight-tusked elephant (*Palaeoloxodon antiquus*), a rhinoceros of unknown species, a bear of uncertain species, red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), fallow deer (*Dama dama*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), giant deer (*Megaloceros giganteus*) and either bison or aurochs. Aquatic invertebrate remains show the water to have been fresh with either still or slowly moving water, confirming its status as a lake (or series of interconnected ponds).

From an archaeological viewpoint, the Hitchin lake-bed is well-known for the collection of Lower Palaeolithic tools recovered from it, mostly during the nineteenth century. Over a hundred such artefacts – mostly 'handaxes' (not axes but multi-purpose tools) – have been found. As they were dispersed between different museums in the early twentieth century, they have never been studied as a group; some passed to Letchworth and Hitchin Museums, and are now in the North Hertfordshire Museum collection. One was found 'near Gosmore' and is now in North Hertfordshire Museum (Accession Number 80; Figure 4). Sir John Evans listed 'implements' in 1893, but he may have been referring to the previous handaxe, as he cited William Ransom, its collector, as the source of information. The National Monuments Record (number 362287) locates Palaeolithic discoveries as Thistley Farm. It cites oral evidence and unarchived correspondence, while also listing a collection of objects including handaxe 80 separately (number 362258). These are probably the same discoveries, the former being assigned a grid reference close to the village centre in the absence of more detailed

Figure 4: handaxe from 'near Gosmore' (North Hertfordshire Museum Accession Number 80)

information. Another handaxe was found 'some years' before 2011, ten metres from Ippollitts Brook at The Willows, although its present location is unknown.

These finds point to the presence of an ancient hominid, generally known as *Homo heidelbergensis*, passing through the area. These people were ancestors of Neanderthals and thus not our direct ancestors. Their way of life depended on following herds of game animals – of which there was a wide variety, as we have seen – and seasonally available plants. The ready availability of flint in this area was probably well-known. People made and discarded tools that would have been too cumbersome to carry on their journeys through the landscape, as hunter-gatherers.

The warm climate that had attracted these early people had turned cold again by about 375,000 years

Figure 5: Mesolithic flint point

ago. Although remains of the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic have been found elsewhere in North Hertfordshire, none are known from St Ippollitts. Only small numbers of people travelled through the district during the later parts of the Pleistocene, and even after the climate warmed from about 12,000 BC, discoveries are scarce.

The people who entered Britain as the climate warmed after the glacial period were the same species as ourselves, *Homo sapiens*. These people account for about 2% of present-day populations' DNA, meaning that many of us will have an ancestor among the small numbers of Early Mesolithic hunter-gatherers who crossed this area. One possible artefact from this period, a geometric microlith in the collection of North Hertfordshire Museum (Accession Number 1976.1015), is said to have come from Gosmore. Originally in Hitchin Museum's collections, it is probably one of the 'two Neolithic/Bronze Age flint arrowheads' recorded in the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (number 389). There is also a flint point on a blade (Figure 5), possibly another Early Mesolithic geometric microlith accessioned as 1977.2611 when transferred from Hitchin Museum, said to have been found 'near Hitchin ?St Ippollitts'. Microliths were the typical stone technology of the Mesolithic. Instead of making large, whole tools from a flint nodule or from blades and flakes chipped from them, this new type shows a more economical use of raw materials.

This early phase of prehistory came to an end with the separation of Britain from continental Europe as a result partly of rising sea levels as glacial ice in the north melted but more catastrophically because
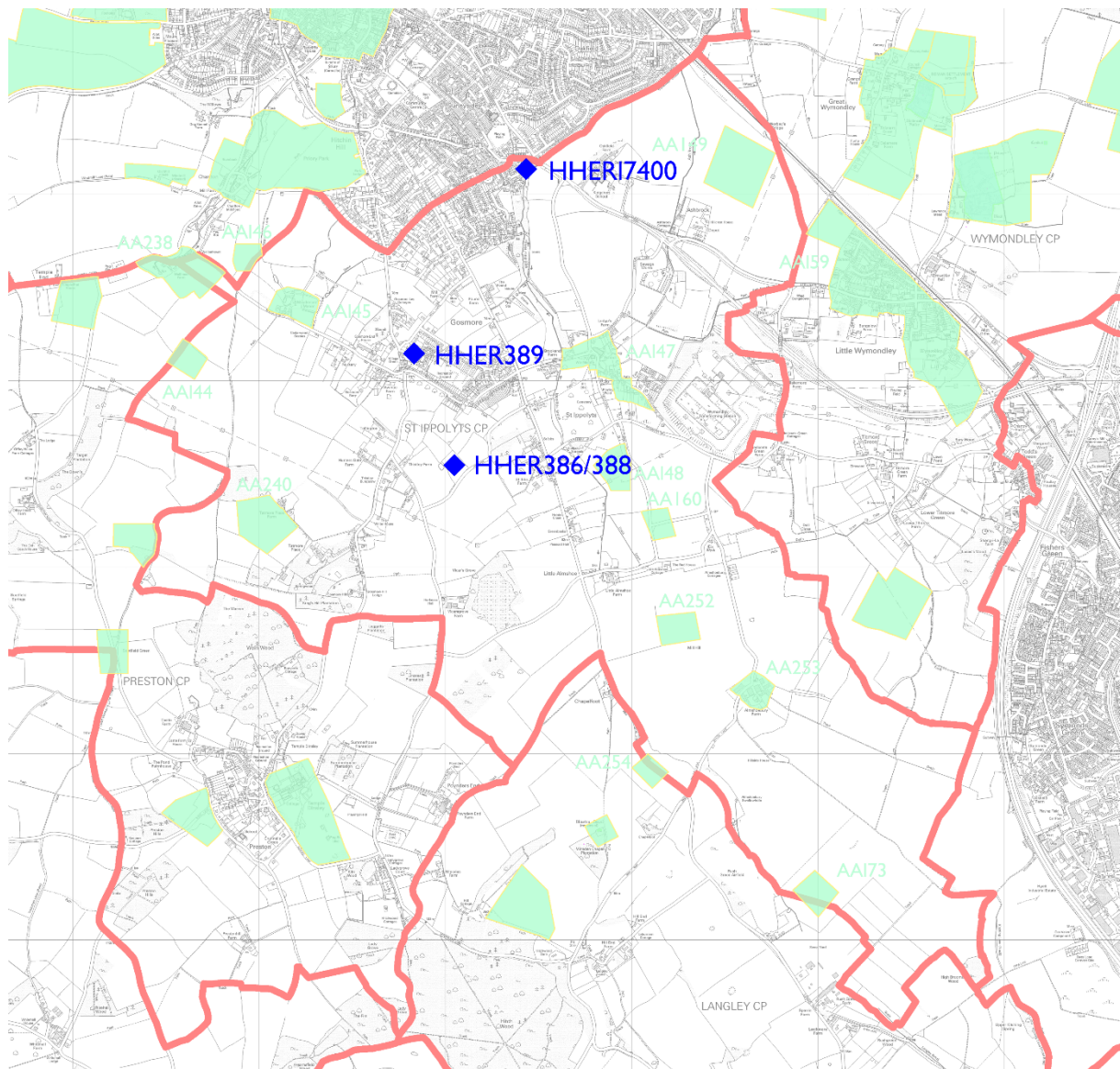

Figure 6: early prehistoric finds in St Ippollitts

of the effects of a tsunami, known as the Storegga Slide, about 6150 BC. An underwater landslip to the west of Norway caused a tidal wave that swept west and south. It was funnelled into the V-shaped estuary that lay between modern Denmark to the east, and Dogger Bank to the west, gaining energy as it travelled. It swept across the low-lying hills between Kent and the Pas-de-Calais, creating a channel of water that the animals followed by the hunter-gatherer population could not cross. In a matter of hours, the migration routes of animals in Britain were cut off and they, and the people who hunted them, were suddenly confined to a newly-created island.

Reference	Description	NGR
HER 386	Palaeolithic handaxe	TL 188271
HER 388	Palaeolithic implements	TL 190265
HER 389	Geometric microlith from Gosmore	TL 188271
HER 17400	Palaeolithic handaxe	TL 194281
	Mesolithic flint point on a blade	

Table 1: early prehistoric finds from St Ippollitts

Later prehistory (*c* 6150 to 100 BC)

The changed conditions for animals and people after the Storegga Slide led slowly to enormous changes. Herds of animals that had spent winters in the lower-lying lands now engulfed by the North Sea or in southern areas like France could no longer migrate to northern pastures in Britain during the summer months. As their geographical ranges became more restricted, so did those of the people who hunted them. Human lives became more settled, and with the change came the need to build permanent shelters. Evidence for this period is also absent from St Ippollitts, but a flint tranchet axehead discovered near Chapelfoot shows that at least some people lived locally. These axeheads were used to cut down trees and, probably, to shape timber. Besides felling woodland for wood, the open areas created places where hunters could more easily target herds of deer.

New groups of people arrived about 4000 BC, bringing domesticated crops and herds with them. Originally from Syria and northern Iraq, these people had colonised all Europe, mixing with the locals. About 20% of people in Britain today have their DNA. The early farmers were the first to make extensive alterations to the landscape, creating fields and making monuments. The monument types included burial mounds known as long barrows, although none has yet been recognised in the parish.

However, aerial photographs show a probable causewayed enclosure to the south of Vicarsgrove Farm (Figure 7). Ditches with numerous gaps, often arranged in concentric rings, are the defining feature of these monuments. Three rings are partly visible in the crop, showing in most years since 2015, enclosing an area on a south-facing slope overlooking a dry valley, a typical location. All dated examples were built in fewer than three centuries, between 3800 and 3500 BC. Many continued to be used for some time afterwards, falling out of use by 3000 BC. They are often found in landscapes that included long
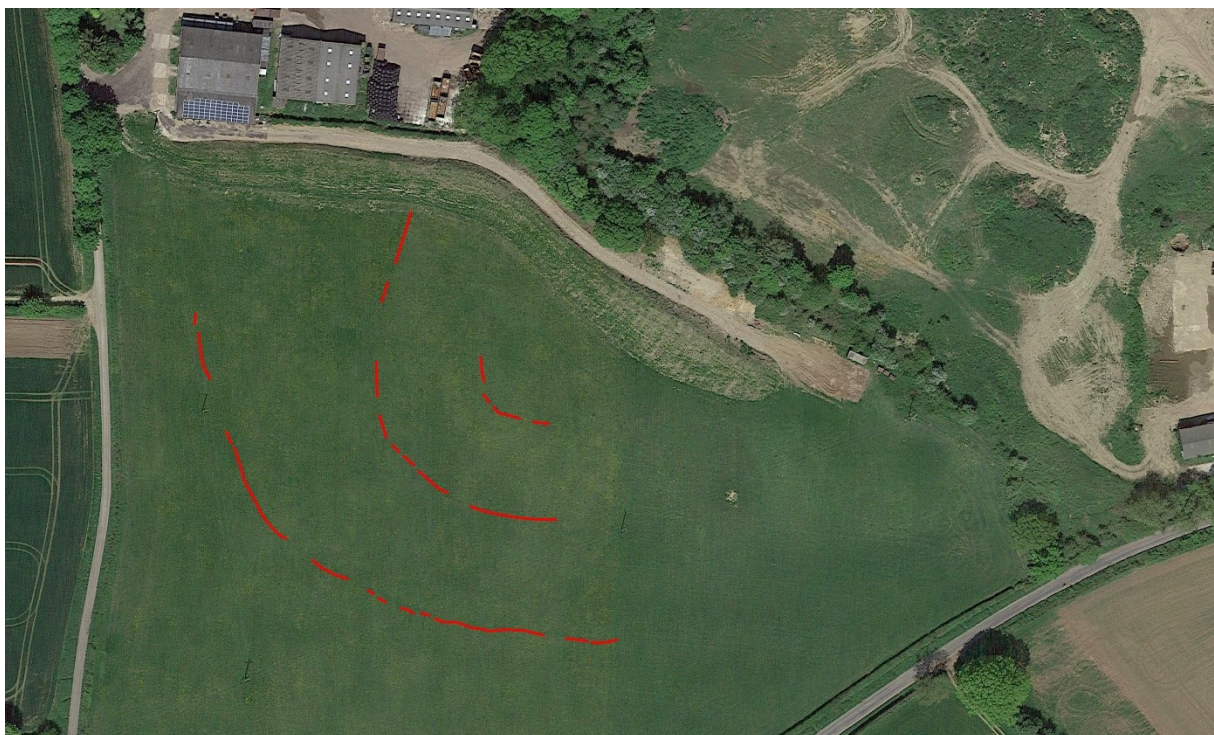

Figure 7: possible causewayed enclosure south of Vicarsgrove Farm

barrows and cursus, parallel-ditched monuments that may have been used as processional ways.

Causewayed enclosures are obscure monuments whose purpose is unknown, with excavation showing a wide variety of uses. Some contain human remains, although they were not burial grounds; some contain domestic pottery, although they were not settlements; most contain large amounts of cooked animal bone. The most popular explanation for their use is that they were places where dispersed populations would meet at certain times of the year, much like medieval fairgrounds. If this monument is a causewayed enclosure, only excavation will confirm its character, date and function.
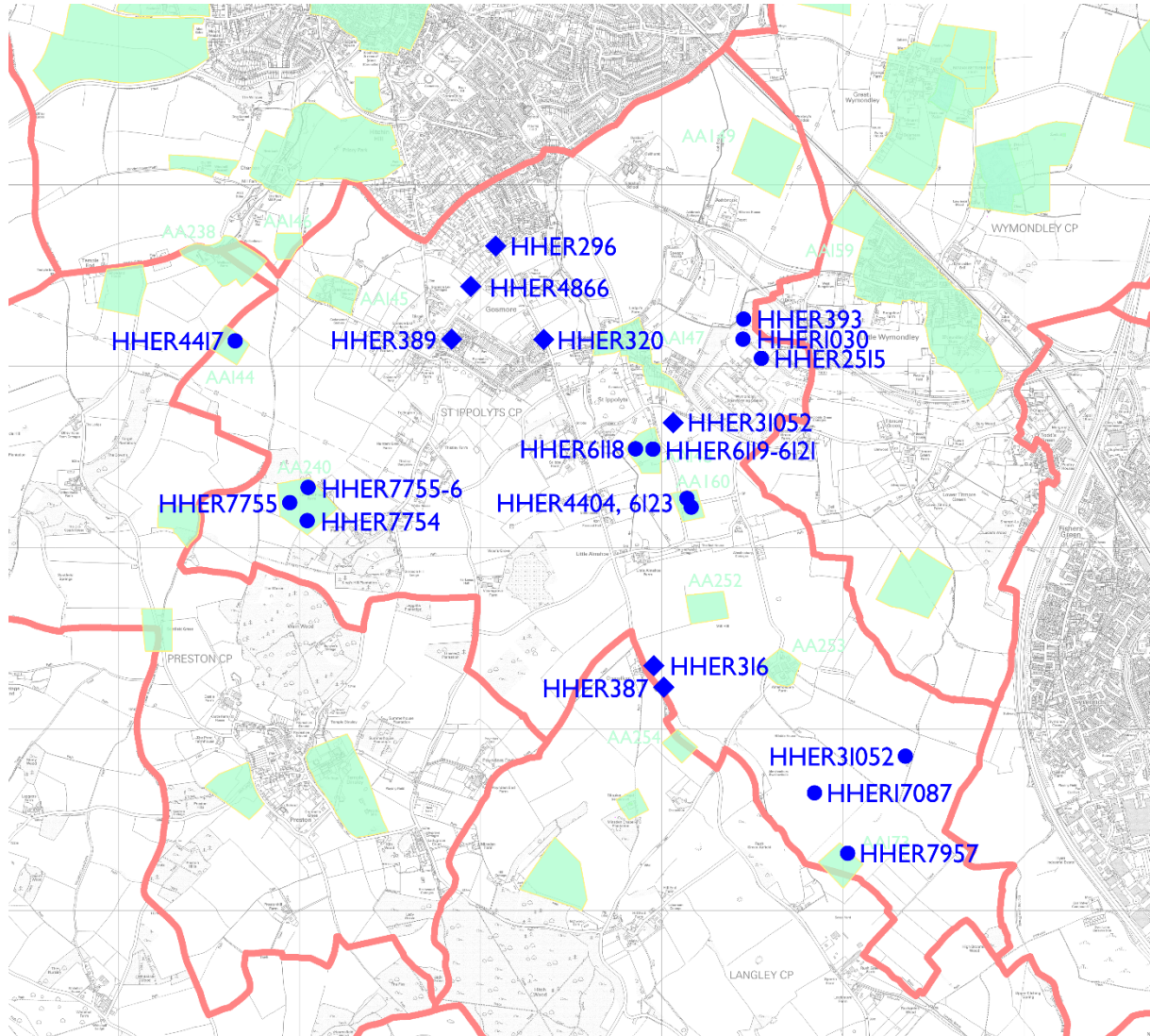

Figure 8: later prehistoric sites and finds in St Ippollitts

Scattered objects of Neolithic date (about 4000-2500 BC) have been found across the parish. A collection from Chapelfoot is in the British Museum (Accession Numbers 2011,8114.804 and 2011,8114.805, HHER 316); they include part of a polished flint axehead, scrapers, retouched flakes, cores and débitage (waste material from flint production). HHER 387, a flint fabricator (possibly museum object 1935.7164), is also from this general area. The quantity of material suggests that it comes from a site used regularly. It may have been domestic, religious or ritual: the finds are not specific to any one activity. The North Hertfordshire Museum Sites and Monuments Record gives the findspot as the gravel pit east of Chapelfoot, a few hundred metres north of the Almshoebury swallow hole. The location suggests that the finds were associated with rituals around the place where a stream vanished into the ground. This rare phenomenon, the reverse of what happens at springs, may have seemed inexplicable to people in the past.

There are other records of Neolithic finds from the parish, but these are from unknown contexts. One – HHER 389, a leaf-shaped point in North Hertfordshire Museum, Accession Number 1976.1014 – is said to be 'from Gosmore', but its grid reference points simply to the core of the village. HHER 296 (museum number 1933.6535) is from the north of Gosmore, which is now a suburb of Hitchin; this sort of object is best described as a 'projectile point', as the distinction between spearheads and arrowheads is blurred. Both these are objects that might have been lost during hunting expeditions or even warfare: on their own, they tell us nothing about where people were living and farming. HHER 320, an end scraper on a blade, is an item that may be characterised as deriving from nearby activity.

The years around 3050 BC were a time of significant change, although the reasons for it are not known. Around this time, causewayed enclosures, like the possible example at Vicarsgrove Farm, fell out of use and no more earthen long barrows (burial mounds) were built. New forms of monument were developed, which were generally circular in plan. These included formative henges, like the example at Norton on the eastern edge of Letchworth Garden City, and round barrows. Although round barrows are common across North Hertfordshire, most have been destroyed by ploughing due to extensive agriculture from the late first millennium BC onwards. They are visible on aerial photographs as so-called ring-ditches, the quarries for the material used to make the barrow. Early examples tended to be large and covered inhumation burials, but from about 2500 BC, cremation burials became more common. These later examples are often smaller, and the monument type developed into various sizes and shapes before falling out of favour about 1400 BC.

They are often found in groups, as is the case in St Ippollitts, where clusters have been recognised in several locations. Sometimes, they were part of more extensive burial grounds, with cremation burials deposited in the open spaces between them. They were generally located in prominent positions, often below the crest of a hill or ridge, where they would be more visible from the lower ground, perhaps ensuring that travellers in the valleys could see them. For this reason, it is often believed that they were situated close to the edge of social territories. Their distribution in the landscape may thus provide clues to where people were living and farming as well as where tracks may have been.

One group is found on the east-facing slope of the Tatmore Hills (Archaeological Area 240, containing HHER 7754 to 7757; Figure 9). Four have been recognised in the field to the southwest of Tatmore Place Farm; a possible fifth ring ditch is also visible in the field to the east. A kilometre to the north-
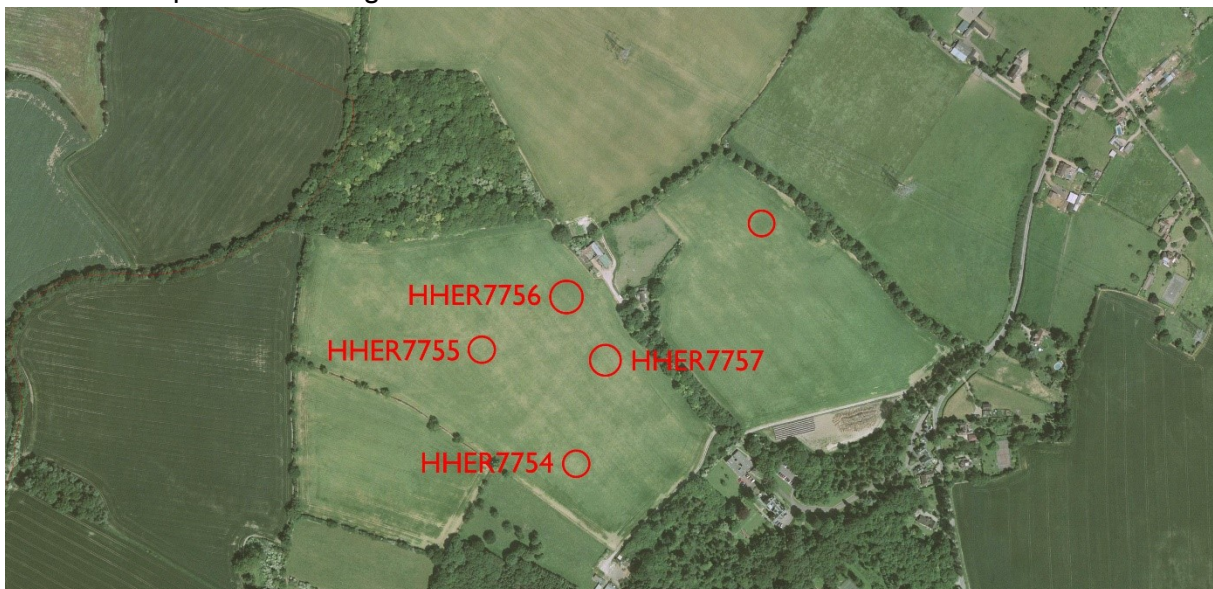

Figure 9: ring ditches in Archaeological Area 240, Tatmore Hills

Figure 10: ring ditches south of Sperberry Hill in Archaeological Areas 148 and 160

northwest, at least one more ring ditch has been seen to the west of Tatmorehills Lane (Archaeological Area 144, HHER 4417) and two other possible ring ditches are also visible. These lie in a shallow valley facing northwest. If they belonged to a single community, it might have been situated on the hill between Offleyholes and Tatmore Place; if they belonged to separate communities, they might have been located closer to Gosmore and Temple End respectively.

Figure 11: ring ditches and other anomalies east of Ashbrook in Archaeological Area 149

Another group of ring ditches has long been known south of Sperberry Hill, towards Little Almshoe (Archaeological Area 148, HHER 6118-6121, Figure 10), with at least one more to the southeast (Archaeological Area 160, HHER 6123, Figure 10). This group is more challenging to recognise from aerial photography owing to the diverse nature of the geology in this area. Moreover, geophysics and trial trenching have shown that one anomaly once believed to be a ring ditch, HHER 4404, is an enclosure and trackway of Roman date. The ring ditches in this area are mostly on low-lying ground on the west side of Ippollitts Brook, although HHER 6123 is on the higher ground west of The Wyck.

A further group of ring ditches and other buried archaeological features is visible to the east of Ashbrook (Archaeological Area 149, Figure 11). A single ring ditch was known when this area was first defined, but eight possible examples are visible in this area. They lie on the northwest facing slope of the ridge between Ashbrook and Little Wymondley. None of them seems to have been entered into the county Historic Environment Record. The community whose leaders were buried here may have farmed the land in the valley between Ashbrook, Kingshott and Ninesprings on the northern edge of the modern parish.

Towards the southeastern end of the parish, south of Almshoebury, Archaeological Area 173 (Figure 12) includes ring ditch HHER 7957. Four possible ring ditches are visible in this area, together with two small ring ditches that may be drip gullies from roundhouses and an extensive group of anomalies that appear to show buried pits. The possible roundhouses and pits may be part of a settlement later in

Figure 12: ring ditches and other anomalies south of Almshoebury, in Archaeological Area 173

date than the earlier Bronze Age burial mounds, perhaps from the first millennium BC.

An unusual find was made by a schoolboy in a gravel pit at Gosmore in December 1926: a Middle Bronze Age sword broken into three pieces North Hertfordshire Museum Accession number

Figure 13: the Ballintober type sword from Gosmore

1927.4387, HHER 4386; Figure 13). The style is known as a 'Ballintober' sword, after the place in Ireland where one was first recognised, and it belongs to the Penard phase of metalworking, 1350-1140 BC. The breaks were made by heating the sword and then hammering it as there is no sign of the distortion that bending it would have left. This intentional breakage involved considerable preparation and deliberately removed the sword from use. Similarly, its deposition in what was probably a pond in the late second millennium BC was also no accident. The destruction of bronze weapons and placing them in wet places – river, ponds and bogs – is typical of the later Bronze Age. Sometimes they are part of larger assemblages, and a single instance like this is less common. The purpose of such actions is not clear. Some have suggested that they might be offerings to underworld deities, perhaps even an appeal to reverse the ongoing climate change that made Britain colder and wetter. Weapons may have been tainted by their owner's death, especially if this had been due to violence, so the bad luck associated with them may have been destroyed along with the object. Questions like this, while unanswerable, help us to engage with the beliefs of people in the past.

The number of barrow cemeteries visible as groups of ring ditches is unusual but perhaps reflects the local topography. It suggests that many small communities farmed the hillsides in the valleys of the different streams and brooks. These watercourses provided watermeadows and opportunities to fish, hunt wildfowl and gather reeds for thatch and basketry. It is not unusual that traces of these farms have not been identified: Bronze Age settlements are notoriously difficult to locate. Many may have been in the valley bottoms, where colluvium (soil washed downhill) has covered them, making them invisible to aerial photography. These low-lying areas are also less frequently developed today, so chance discoveries by archaeologists are uncommon. A large number of people must have lived and farmed in St Ippollitts.

Reference	Description	NGR
HER 296	Possible Neolithic spearhead	TL 190276
HER 316	Neolithic flint axehead	TL 199253
HER 320	End scraper on blade	TL 193271
HER 387	Neolithic flint fabricator	TL 199252
HER 389	Leaf-shaped point from Gosmore	TL 188271
HER 393	Ring ditch	TL 205282
HER 1030	Ring ditch	TL 205281
HER 2515	Ring ditch	TL 206280
HER 2609	Undated pits or postholes	TL 211261
HER 4417	Ring ditch	TL 176271
HER 4866	Ballintober type sword	TL 189273
HER 6118	Ring ditch	TL 198265
HER 6119	Ring ditch	TL 199265
HER 6120	Ring ditch	TL 199265
HER 6121	Ring ditch	TL 199265
HER 6123	Ring ditch	TL 201262

HER 6555	Round barrow, Round Hill (?)	TL 198272
HER 7754	Ring ditch	TL 180261
HER 7755	Ring ditch	TL 180263
HER 7756	Ring ditch	TL 180263
HER 7757	Ring ditch	TL 179262
HER 7957	Ring ditch	TL 210243
HER 15675	Cremation burial	TL
HER 17087	Eroded barrows?	TL 208246
HER 17088	Eroded round barrows	TL 213248

Table 2: later prehistoric sites and finds in St Ippollitts

The Late Iron Age and Roman occupation (c 100 BC-AD 411)

Southeastern Britain was coming into contact with the classical world by the second century BC. Trade in luxury goods (such as the Italian metalwork and wine-transporting amphora buried with a local chieftain in Baldock before 100 BC) rather than military conquest was the driving force. Early in the first century BC, local rulers began minting coins based on designs of those issued by Gaulish kings that had started to circulate here late in the previous century.
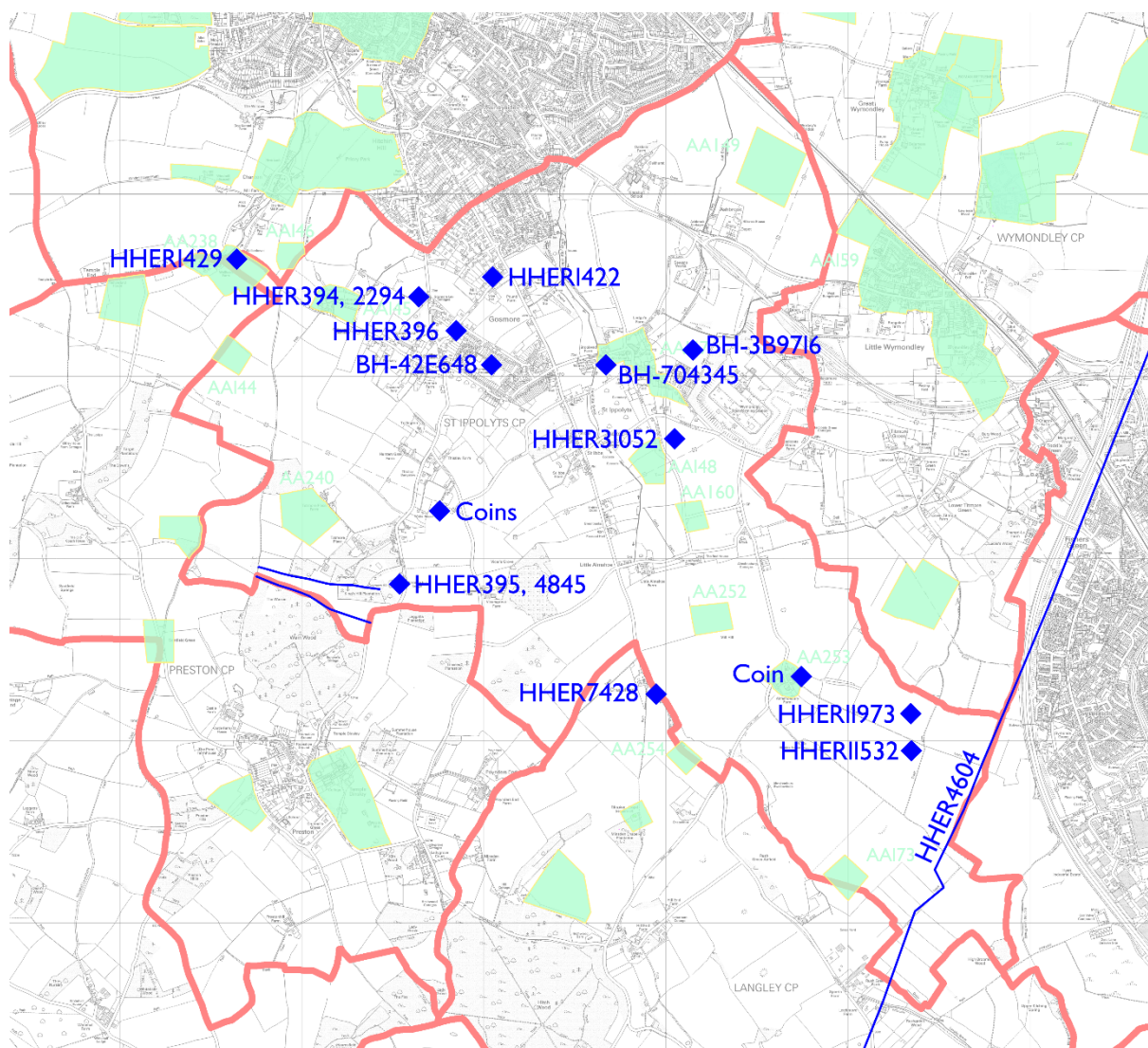

Figure 14: Late Iron Age and Romano-British sites and finds in St Ippollitts

The first century BC was also a time of rapid population growth. Improvements in agricultural techniques during the Iron Age (about 800 BC to AD 43) had brought larger areas into cultivation and sustained more people. Nucleated settlements began to develop, including an early example – perhaps the first 'town' in Britain – at Baldock, which became a sub-regional centre, perhaps supporting a dynasty of kings. Smaller villages and farmsteads established at this time often continued to flourish after the Roman conquest, their fields and trackways remaining in use.

When Julius Caesar began his invasion of Gaul in 58 BC, the local kings sought military help from Britain. They paid the mercenaries in gold coins, which made their way back with the soldiers at the end of each campaigning season. Caesar raided Britain twice, in 55 and 54 BC, probably to punish its rulers for supporting Gaulish kings. The settlement of his second campaign saw a part of the southeast of the island brought into tributary status to Rome. To ensure the continuing compliance of British kings, they were required to send their sons to Rome to be educated. There, they were taught Roman culture and would serve as officers in the army; when their father died, one would be chosen to return to Britain and become king in his place. Slowly, over the next century, the southeastern kingdoms became increasingly Romanised. When Claudius invaded in AD 43 (ostensibly to settle a dynastic dispute), there was little change for the locals.

Popular culture associates road building with the Roman army, but it began about thirty years after Caesar's campaigns, while Britain remained outside the empire. The southeastern edge of St Ippollitts parish partly overlies the road that connected Baldock, an ancient royal centre, with *Ụerolaṃion*, a new administrative centre established at St Albans about 20 BC. Although the northern end of the road has long been known, most earlier researchers lost sight of it northeast of Rush Green (but see the next paragraph). Lidar scans of the area have revealed the low embankment, known as an *agger*, that carried the road above the level of the surrounding fields to help with drainage. Much of its course can now be traced, including through the southern end of St Ippollitts. It is unlikely that the road existed before *Ụerolaṃion* was founded, but it would have been essential as a link with Baldock after 20 BC.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a group of enthusiastic Roman road hunters scoured the southeast Midlands for traces of the ancient system. In their definition, Hertfordshire is part of the southeast Midlands, so their network includes claimed roads in our area. They published the results of their researches under the pseudonym of The Viatores in 1964. Two of them pass through St Ippollitts: routes 210 (Dungee Corner north Bedford to *Ụerolaṃium*) and 221 (Baldock to Coleman Green). Angela Simco undertook an analysis of their work as it relates to Bedfordshire in the 1980s and found that not one of their claimed new routes stood up to scrutiny and some were first established as a result of Enclosure in the eighteenth can nineteenth centuries. Route 210 is claimed to follow London Road through St Ippollitts: they provided no evidence for an ancient origin, so it is probably a fantasy.

Their Route 221 (HHER 4604; Figure 14) followed the known road south-southwest from Baldock to the point northeast of Rush Green, where the Ordnance Survey stops marking it. In their view, it continued on the same alignment through St Ippollitts as far as south of Easthall Farm in St Pauls Walden, after which they traced it along a zig-zag course that followed parish boundaries but has no confirmatory evidence. Lidar data makes it clear that it instead took a more northerly course through Kimpton and Wheathampstead directly to *Ụerolaṃium*. In the southeastern part of St Ippollitts, Lidar shows that it followed a small kink north of Rush Green to navigate a hollow southwest of Symonds Green.

The archaeological contracting company Archaeology South-East carried out a geophysical survey and trial-trenching of land between Tittendell Lane, Sperberry Hill, White Lane and Little Almshoe Lane in

2015. The work was in response to an application to install solar panels for electrical generation on the southern part of the field. At the north end, the geophysical survey revealed an enclosure straddling the road at Sperberry Hill with a narrow entrance approached along a curving trackway (HHER 31052; Figure 15). This is a characteristic Iron Age monument, known as a 'banjo' enclosure. The type originated around 500 BC and continued to be used into the first century AD. This part of the field, north of the high-tension power line, was not trenched, so the precise dating was uncertain during the evaluation. Several roundhouse drip gullies are visible as anomalies inside it, showing it to have been a settlement site. The ditched trackway can be traced for only a short distance: it would have joined other tracks and field boundaries. Its location on the plateau, with the entrance facing south towards the valley of Ippollitts Brook, suggests that its owners farmed the land on the hilltop and the valley towards St Ibbs and Little Almshoe.

The trial trenching also revealed Late Iron Age and Romano-British occupation in the angle between Tittendell Lane and Little Almshoe Lane on a site that had previously been thought to be a Bronze Age ring ditch. The geophysical survey had shown parallel ditches with an oval enclosure to the west and two subrectangular enclosures to the east, the southernmost cut by Little Almshoe Lane. Finds from features excavated in the trial trenches suggested that activity began in the second century BC and continued into the early second century AD. Postholes dating from the Roman period suggested the presence of a timber-framed building. There was no later Roman activity, although it is possible that the focus of the farmstead shifted away, perhaps to the south. Like the 'banjo' enclosure to the north, the focus of this farm probably lay on the plateau, with watermeadows to the west around Ippollitts Brook.

An application to develop the area between Sperberry Hill and Stevenage Road led to further archaeological work in 2020. A geophysical survey and trial trenching identified the 'banjo' enclosure's northern arm. The trenching showed that it dated from the Late Iron Age and that activity continued

Figure 15: banjo enclosure HER31052 and enclosure to its south, east of Tittendell Lane

into the early Roman period. Most of the pottery found consisted of grog-tempered wares, including typical large storage jars, but there were also sherds from butt beakers in local and Gallo-Belgic wares and imported samian wares. Fragments of Roman brick and tile were found in the enclosure ditch and a large hollow to its south, showing that Roman-style buildings with lied roofs and brick decoration existed on the site as well as the indigenous roundhouses visible in geophysics to the south.

No other settlements of this period have yet been identified in the parish, although there are hints in several places. In the far northwest of the parish, some late Roman coins were found 'near' Wellhead, south of Charlton. The source for these discoveries, a Gazetter in the Victoria County History of Hertfordshire volume 4 does not clarify if a '*biscuit-coloured urn, 5 in. high, from here*' was also found near Wellhead or '*in the neighbourhood of Hitchin*'. There are some short lengths of ditch, a possible polygonal enclosure and a few pits visible to the east of Wellhead (Figure 16), which may locate an ancient settlement or farmstead outside St Ippollitts, in Hitchin parish.

There are scattered Late Iron Age and Romano-British finds from elsewhere in the parish, but no definite concentrations other than south of Thistley Farm. Here, a group of fourth-century Roman bronze coins derives from metal detecting in a single field. Understanding whether they are the remains of a plough-scattered hoard (unlikely given that they are low-value denominations), indicative of settlement, a villa or a result of manuring fields with household waste is impossible to determine. Aerial photographs show buried ditches in this area, extending to the east across Thistley Lane, but some of them appear to be of more recent (post-medieval or modern date) and none is clearly related to a Roman settlement or field system. The geology of this area is also complex, producing cropmarks that are not archaeological in origin.

Figure 16: cropmarks near Wellhead in Archaeological Area 146; the parallel ditches running northeast are part of the former lane to Hitchin, closed in the 1770s

BH-3B9716

BH-DE4385   BH-42E648

Figure 17: finds of Roman date made by detectorists in St Ippollitts (© Portable Antiquities Scheme, reused under a Creative Commons Licence)

Three Romano-British urns (HHER 395) and an Iron Age vessel (HHER 4845) were found when a pair of cottages were built on Preston Road, to the southwest of where these coins were discovered. They evidently came from a small cemetery dating from the first century AD and perhaps later, which could have been the burial ground of the community whose members lost the coins to the northeast. They also stand at the east end of a substantial bank, two metres high. This earthwork runs along the north side of the dry valley southwest of Tatmore Place. On the south side of the valley, the current parish boundary now follows a lower bank that forms the edge of The Warren, part of Wain Wood planted between 1900 and 1940.

Gil Burleigh has identified these banks as part of a Romano-British ritual landscape. A disused chalk pit at the head of the valley periodically contains water and may once have been a seasonal pond before quarrying began. There are springs in this area, which could have fed a winterbourne flowing down the valley, past Tatmore Place and Vicarsgrove Farm to join Ippollitts Brook near Little Almshoe. A stream flowed through the valley during wet weather in early 2014, terminating in a pond that developed at its mouth. Within a matter of months, stream and pond were dry again. Natural sites of this type are often hard to characterise; as seen above, the Almshoebury swallow-hole seems to have attracted prehistoric activity, while a winterbourne in Bygrave was part of a Late Iron Age and Roman ritual landscape.

Several finds of material of this period have been made around Gomore. HHER 394 is described as 'a twisted wire brooch' and was associated with HHER 2294, an iron brooch pin. Both were found in a field next to an undated mound, which is perhaps a feature visible on Lidar east of Maidencroft and north of the tumulus in the village. These could belong to the first century BC through to the second century AD, but we do not know where they are today to confirm the identification. HHER 396 is poorly located: according to a gazetteer in Stevenage Museum, 'Roman pottery or evidence of occupation' was found in the village, but no further details are known. A copper-alloy finger-ring (BH-42E643; Figure 17), found by a metal detectorist, could be evidence for settlement or it could have been a casual loss in fields or by a traveller. There is also a 'Roman spearhead' (HHER 1422) accessioned

to Letchworth Museum (1935.6535) and said to be from Windmill Field; it was loaned by Reginald Hine but appears to have been withdrawn from the collection. It is now impossible to know whether this was a genuinely Roman artefact or something else.

In recent years, metal detectorists have made a number of finds of Roman date, especially of coins. Most of these have come from a field south of Thistley Farm. Apart from one radiate of Tetricus I or II (AD 271-274), all these coins are of fourth-century date. It is impossible to know what the circumstances of their loss may have been, but the close dating may indicate that those of the first half of the century derive from a plough-scattered hoard. There are traces of linear ditches, including a possible trackway visible on aerial photographs in this area (Figure 18), while a small group of pits may be evidence for a settlement nearby. Most of the ditches are probably field boundaries. Unfortunately, this is an area of very mixed geology, making the recognition of buried archaeological features challenging.

The Romano-British landscape of St Ippollitts suggests a thinner population than during the Bronze Age, which is unusual. The prehistoric evidence may by exceptionally visible and the Roman less so. It lies in the hinterland of Baldock, a significant settlement and market centre. A major road, linking Baldock with the regional capital at *Uerolamium* passes through the southeastern part of the parish. A new small town began to develop at Hitchin in the decades after 300, while other large villages existed nearby, as at Pirton. There was a villa estate at Ninesprings to the north, and a less well-off but prosperous farm at Little Wymondley, and, curiously, no villa has been recognised in St Ippollitts. Roman finds were made during fieldwalking in the 1980s at Waylay Green, on the boundary with Preston.

Figure 18: buried ditches south of Thistley Farm

The mixed character of the underlying geology, with pockets of gravel, sand and other periglacial tills, makes the formation of cropmarks less frequent than in nearby areas that sit directly on the chalk bedrock. The known farmsteads at Tittendell Lane were unprepossessing peasant settlements, their inhabitants living in roundhouses rather than the timber-framed cottages favoured by the more

prosperous. The existence of the 'banjo' enclosure was unknown before archaeological fieldwork in this area, so there may well be similar sites awaiting discovery elsewhere in the parish.

Nevertheless, the lack of a site that could be a villa is unusual. Most parishes in the hinterland of Baldock had at least one such institution, and some larger parishes had several. They were not farmhouses but the centres of landed estates owned by the landlords of the peasant farmers whose homes have been located. In some places, villa estates have been located after the discovery of large quantities of metalwork by detectorists. Few St Ippollitts farmers have permitted detecting, although unreported and illegal detecting may have taken place: we are dependent on the honesty of detectorists to report their discoveries to the Finds Liaison Officer. Without such co-operation, detectorists may amass collections that give them pleasure but which contribute nothing to a broader understanding of the past.

Reference	Description	NGR
HER 394	Bronze wire brooch	TL 186273
HER 395	Three Romano-British cinerary urns	TL 188272
HER 396	Romano-British pottery	TL 188272
HER 1422	Roman spearhead	TL 190275
HER 1429	Late Roman coins and vessel	TL 176276
HER 2294	Iron brooch pin	TL 186273
HER 2606	Late Iron Age ditch	TL 212264
HER 2665	Roadside ditches (1974 pipeline!)	TL 200269
HER 4600	Roman Road 210	TL 174180
HER 4604	Supposed Roman Road 210 (unlikely)	TL 186252
HER 4604	Supposed Roman Road 221 (unlikely)	TL 203203
HER 4604	Roman Road 221	TL 232289
HER 4845	Late Iron Age vessel	TL 185258
HER 7428	Roman road	TL 199252
HER 11532	Village or farmstead	TL 213249
HER 11973	Occupation site	TL 213251
HER 31052	'Banjo' enclosure	TL 200266
	Coin of Maximian I	TL 207253
BH-3B9716	Steelyard weight	
BH-42E648	Copper alloy finger-ring	
BH-DE4385	Silver crescentic pendant	
BH-30B13E	Dupondius of Antoninus Pius	
BH-30F204	Radiate coin (Reece period 13)	
BH-30E87B	Radiate coin (Reece periods 13 or 14)	
BH-30D357	Barbarous radiate of Tetricus I or II	
BH-310E34	Fourth-century bronze *nummus*	
BH-19FB29	Bronze *nummus* of Maximian I	
BH-1BD73B	Bronze *nummus* of Crispus	
BH-30CC8C	Bronze *nummus* of Crispus	
BH-704345	Bronze *nummus* of Constantine I	
BH-1956A1	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Constantine	
BH-19439A	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Constantine	
BH-191FF5	Bronze *nummus* of Constantine II as Caesar	
BH-3108B4	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Constantine	
BH-310291	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Constantine	

BH-30FC5C	Bronze *nummus* of Constans	
BH-30E180	Contemporary copy of a bronze *nummus* of Constantius I	
BH-30D99E	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Valentinian	
BH-19900C	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Valentinian	
BH-197E7A	Bronze *nummus* of the House of Valentinian	
BH-19D750	*Siliqua* of Valens	

Table 3: Late Iron Age and Roman sites and finds in St Ippollitts

The Middle Ages (AD 411-1485)

The collapse of Roman rule in the fifth century led to a long-term change in lowland Britain's ethnic composition. No longer defended from sea-borne raiders (*Scotti* from Ireland, Picts from the north and Saxons from continental Europe) by Roman garrisons, the locals replaced them with Germanic mercenary settlers during the 420s. Their numbers rapidly increased until they began to take control across large areas of eastern Britain. It happened piecemeal and some areas – including northern Hertfordshire – were never settled *en masse* but were more gradually absorbed by the developing statelets under Saxon control.

Two pieces of local evidence show the complexity of the situation. First is the survival of culture and, presumably, a British population at Baldock and surrounding areas, seen in the continued production of Romano-British styles of pottery and the Brittonic placename of Hitchin. Second is the occasional find of Anglo-Saxon metalwork by metal detectorists, mostly brooches. So-called sub-Roman pottery continued to be made up to the early sixth century, while the earliest metalwork dates from the final decades of the fifth century. The evidence from this area is a clear sign that there was an overlap in culture, traditions and population.

Although none of the sub-Roman pottery found elsewhere in North Hertfordshire has yet been identified in St Ippollitts, there are some significant Anglo-Saxon finds. The earliest is the head of a cruciform brooch of 'Hatton' type in Toby Martin's classification, found across East Anglia, Lincolnshire and the eastern Midlands, and dated about 475 to 550 (Treasure database PUBLIC-922077; Figure 19). It was found in Archaeological Area 149 (Figure 11), a zone that is otherwise characterised by prehistoric burial mounds. The brooch was perhaps part of the clothing worn by a secondary burial inserted into one of the barrows, a relatively common occurrence in the fifth and sixth centuries. There is also a

Figure 19: cruciform brooch fragment, dated c 475-550 (© Portable Antiquities Scheme, reused under a Creative Commons Licence)

possible rectangular enclosure on the hillside facing northwest, roughly where the find was made. Similar features at Slip End (Ashwell) and Hinxworth may be early medieval religious sites, so this could be another context for this brooch's deposition.

Figure 20: scabbard beads dated c 550 found at Pound Farm in 1951

A human burial was found during construction work at Pound Farm in 1951. The finds made their way to Hitchin Museum, and some are now on display in North Hertfordshire Museum. They include an iron shield boss (Accession Number 856), a scramasax (a long knife used as a weapon, 3343/1)), fragments of several ordinary knife blades (3343/3), a belt buckle (3343/2) and tag (1976.176), and coloured scabbard beads (858; Figure 20). A skull (3093) from the burial was identified as male, but this cannot be confirmed as its present whereabouts are unknown. These finds are typical of the sixth century. The shield boss is the most closely-datable item, belonging to the earliest phase of warrior burial, probably before about 550.

A hanging-bowl was discovered in 1916 by workmen digging in a gravel pit; the bowl was filled with beech-nuts, and the workmen tore it apart for souvenirs. The nuts had survived because copper salts from the bronze bowl are poisonous to the bacterial that would otherwise have consumed them. Two of the original five decorated escutcheons (four from the rim and one from the base) made their way to the Victoria And Albert Museum in 1923, where they are still in the collection (Figure 21). The style of decoration suggests that they were made between about 550 and 650. They are generally found accompanying rich burials, the most spectacular being the early seventh-century ship burial at Sutton Hoo, near Ipswich. All accounts in the archaeological literature state that the discovery was made 'near Hitchin' but do not specify a precise location. There are few gravel pits in the area, most of them lying

Figure 21: the surviving escutcheons from the hanging bowl found 'near Hitchin' in 1916 (© The Victoria And Albert Museum)

24

south of the town. Those between Stevenage Road and Blackhorse Lane, and on the opposite side of Stevenage Road seem to stopped production use before 1916. All the other pits in Hitchin were for clay or sand. Of two gravel pits in operation at the time, one was where the Wymondley Transforming Station is now located and the second lay south of Vicar's Grove, where a bag-shaped jar contemporary with the hanging bowl was discovered.

Hanging-bowls were made outside the areas settled by Saxons, and their production began in the fifth century. The style of the 'near Hitchin' bowl's escutcheons on is one that developed towards the end of the sixth century and extended into the eighth. The only place where a mould for one of these vessels has been found is in Pictland, north of Aberdeen, but they are thought to have been made across western and northern Britain. All bowls of the same type as the Hitchin bowl discovered before 1993 were found south of the Humber, so an origin in Wales or northwest England is more likely than Pictland.

The jar from Vicar's Grave gravel pit, now on permanent display in North Hertfordshire Museum (Accession Number 8; Figure 22), was discovered by workmen in 1938 and donated to the developing Hitchin Museum collection. It is a style that can be dated quite closely to the last quarter of the sixth century and would thus be of a similar date to the hanging bowl; they were conceivably part of the same burial. If the two vessels derive from the same grave, it would have been lower down the social scale than the princely tombs beneath mounds, such as Sutton Hoo, Taplow or Prittlewell. On the other hand, they may be unconnected. Nevertheless, the hanging-bowl must have come from the burial of a local leader, perhaps a ruler of the Hicce, the people of the Hitchin area.

Figure 22: jar dated c 575-600 from Vicar's Grove sand pit, discovered in 1938

The patchy archaeological and documentary data for this period is often supplemented from placename evidence. The names of Waylay Green and Wain Wood have been thought to be evidence for a pagan shrine on the Tatmore Hills. As previously seen, this may have been a Romano-British religious site, based around springs and a seasonal watercourse. There are several locations in North Hertfordshire where Roman sacred places have continued to be venerated in the early medieval period; this may be another such site.

The name of Sperberry Hill is fascinating, as its meaning – 'the hill of speech' – suggests that it was once a place where meetings were held. It was perhaps the traditional meeting point of Hitchin Half-Hundred. Their origins are uncertain, and although they are first mentioned in the reign of Eadmund I (939-946) when shires were being created, they seem to belong to an earlier level of administration. The meeting-places, known as moots (from Old English *mōt* or *gemōt*) were partly legal – where local courts were held – and partly fiscal – as units for assessing and collecting taxes. Nominally, each Hundred comprised ten tithings (Old English *tēoþungas*), each of which was made up of ten families.

Figure 24: Lidar data showing a series of enclosures on Sperberry Hill, south of St Ippollitt's church

Lidar data shows a series of enclosures to the south of the parish church that includes subdivisions corresponding with no boundaries extant today (Figure 23). The larger blocks run down the slope to Ippollitts Brook at its foot, while the subdivisions run parallel with the contours (Figure 24). They do not appear to be domestic or agricultural in origin. Their curves are unlike those created by medieval ploughing, which characteristally have a reversed ∫ shape. Might they be connected with the Hundred moot? Many moots focused on prominent features of the human landscape, such as upstanding burial mounds, but that does not seem to be the case here. The church occupies a position on a bluff overlooking the valley to the west, and it might be suggested that a similarly visible feature marked the moot.

Figure 23: interpretation of the Lidar data

Sperberry Hill lane forms the southern edge of the largest enclosure, which is also the most complex of the three. It seems to include a very rectangular block possibly associated with woodland recorded on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maps. St Ibbs Park (formerly known as Queensborough), created about 1801 for William Lax, overlies this earlier landscape; it is impossible to say how much older these subtle earthworks might be. Their irregular, curvilinear shape suggests an early medieval or prehistoric date, most likely the former.
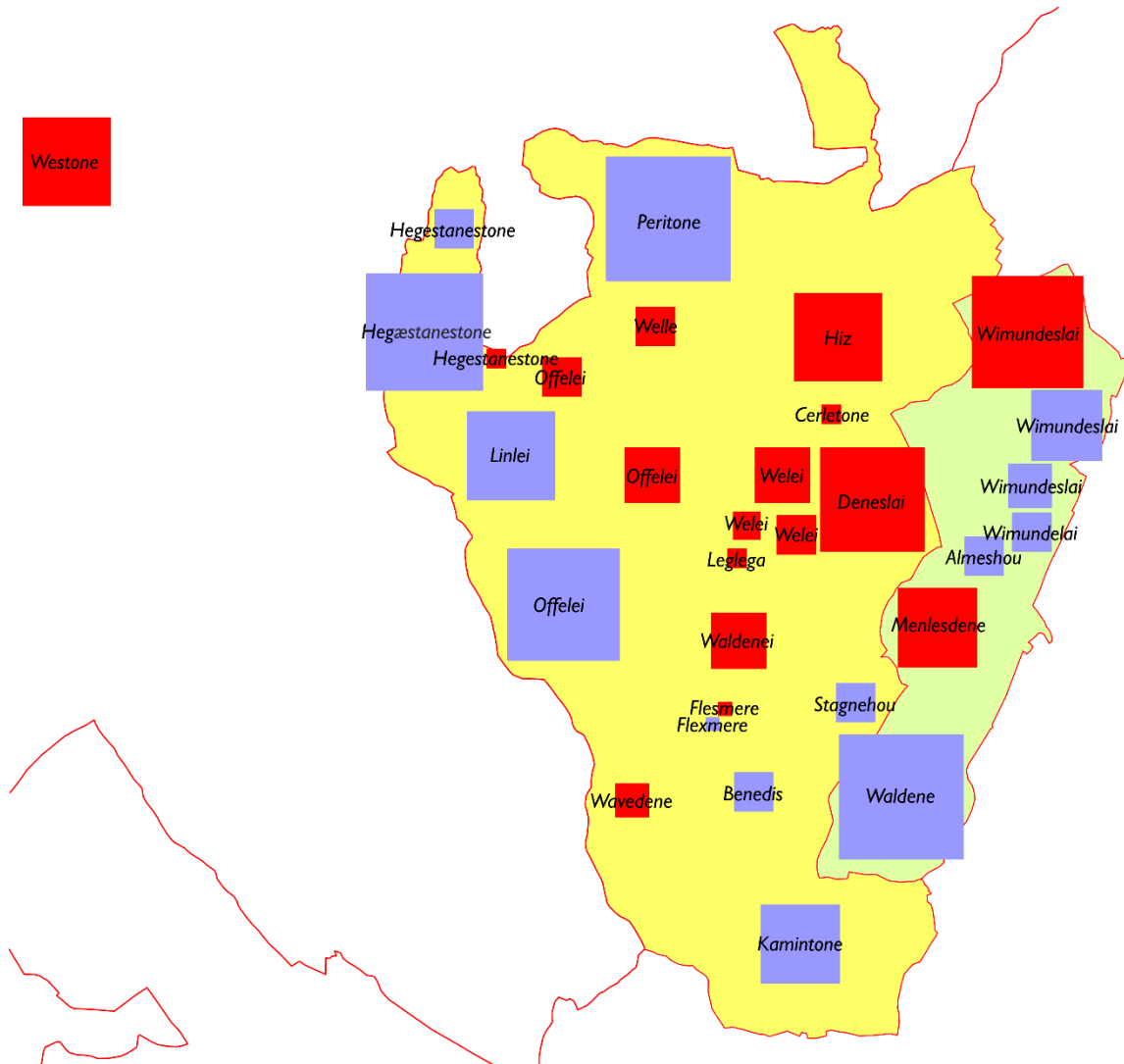

Figure 25: a reconstruction of Hitchin Half Hundred with names from Domesday Book; the size of each square is proportional to the amount of taxable arable land and royal demesne is shown as red, while the green area marks part of Broadwater Hunderd in 1086

Sperberry was probably the moot for Hitchin Half-Hundred (Figure 25), once recorded as *Polletts* (for Ippollitts) Hundred. We may speculate that parts of an initially whole Hundred had been transferred to other Hundreds before the time of the Domesday Survey. By the time of Domesday Book, Hitchin Half-Hundred was assessed on 67 hides and 8 acres of arable: we would expect there to be 50 hides in a half-hundred. If it had initially been organised as a Hundred, almost 33 hides are 'missing'. If we add in St Paul's Walden, assessed as part of Cashio Hundred as it lay in St Albans Abbey's possessions, the total becomes just over 77 hides. Other places outside the Half-Hundred that were nevertheless ecclesiastical dependencies of Hitchin comprise Minsden and the Wymondleys. Almshoe would also logically fit in with this pattern, bringing the total to 97½ hides and 8 acres. This total includes 5 hides for Westoning, in Bedfordshire; by removing this, we are short by just under 8 hides.

This reconstruction of an early Hitchin Hundred is highly speculative. It can be criticised for several of its assumptions. Firstly, that the Half-Hundred must originally have been a complete Hundred. Secondly, for assuming that it ought to have been assessed at exactly 100 hides. Thirdly, for believing that chapelries dependent on the minster church at Hitchin were once part of the Hundred. None of these can be demonstrated conclusively. However, it is curious to note that Hitchin is not the largest manor in its Hundred (Dinsley, Great Wymondley, Hexton, Offley, Pirton and St Paul's Walden were all larger).

Almshoe was one of the manors of the parish at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, although it was assessed in Broadwater Hundred. Its small population indicates that it consisted of little more than the manorial centre, perhaps including the main house and estate workers' dwellings. The core of the present Almshoebury is a mid-thirteenth-century aisled hall house, with later cross-wings and an upper floor inserted in the seventeenth century. A chapel that stood here was dated to the thirteenth century when C B Pearson, rector of Knebworth, sketched it in November 1845. The Oxford Architectural and Historical Society had the drawings in its collection at one time, but they appear to have been lost or given away before 1990. When demolished in the late 1850s, it was being used as a barn. Charles W Wilshere of The Frythe, Welwyn, purchased the windows; he enlarged The Frythe after 1867, although it is not known if the chapel windows were incorporated into the new building. However, it is not clear if this was the first chapel on the site or was rebuilt at the same time as the manor house.

Lidar shows the farm to be surrounded by a nearly circular earthwork (Figure 26), which can also be seen on maps. A few areas have been lost to farmland since the nineteenth century, especially on the
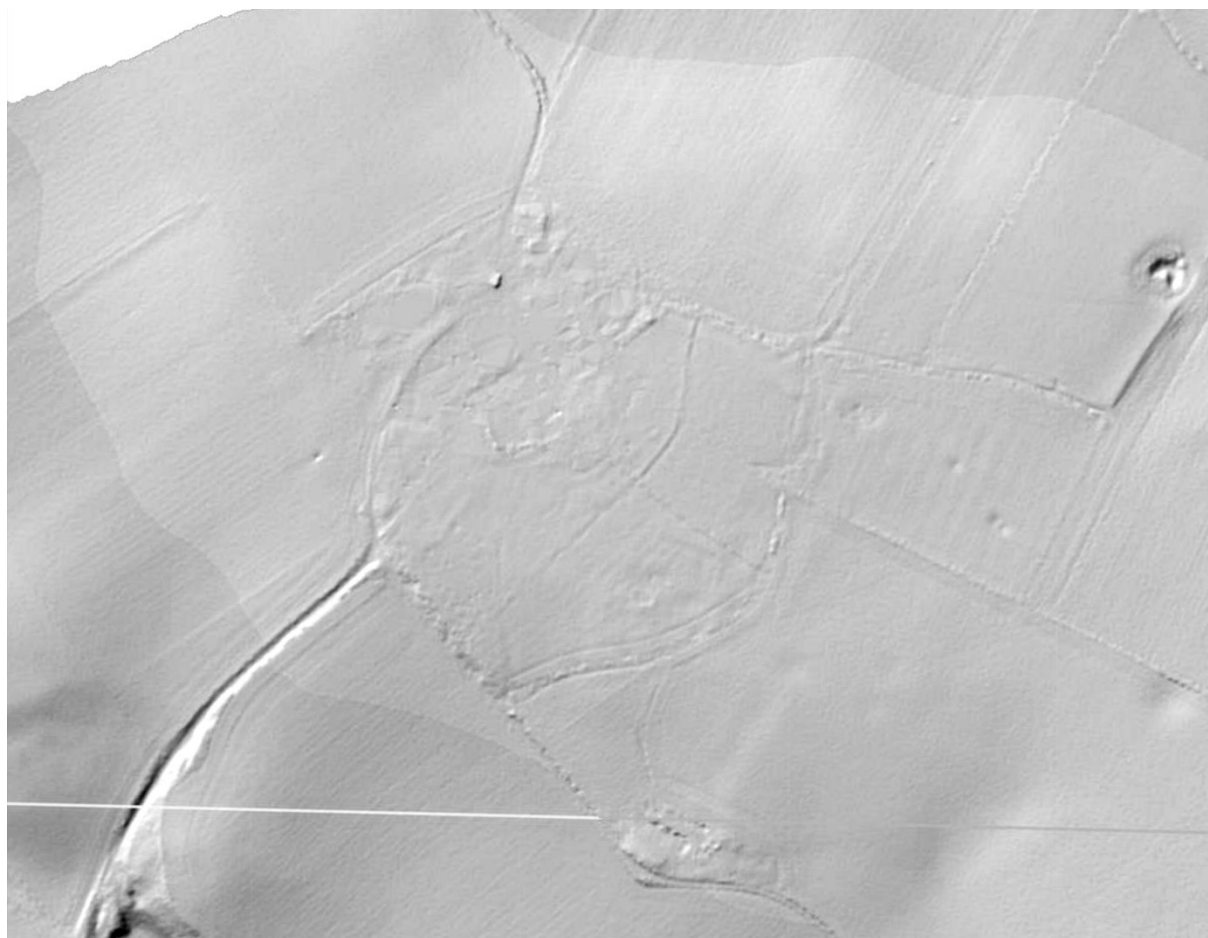

Figure 26: Lidar plot of Almshoebury

western side. It is clearly a manorial enclosure of some kind. Most High Medieval manorial earthworks are rectangular in plan or comprised of several adjoining rectangular elements. An enclosure at Whitehouse Road in Ipswich that was partly excavated in 1994-5 is a very similar shape to that at Almshoe but considerably smaller (about 105 to 110 m in diameter as opposed to about 300 m). The ditch on the site at Ipswich was first dug in the eighth or ninth century and remained open until the eleventh. If the comparison is valid, it suggests that the Almshoe enclosure was of a higher status.

Figure 27: the manorial enclosure at Almshoebury

It would perhaps have been a thegn's residence, belonging to a retainer on the royal estate of Hitchin. They often had impressive entrances and in many ways resembled later Norman ringworks. As well as a house, these earthwork defences often contained a church, farm buildings, and estate workers' homes. In this case, the chapel that stood until the 1850s would have been a successor to an earlier church. As the chapel does not appear in its own right in the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of 1291 (by which time we know that it existed), it must have been a proprietary church of the manor of Almshoe. All early churches in England had been proprietary in origin, which caused much discussion in the eighth century over episcopal oversight, which was generally resisted. With the reforms to minsters in the tenth century and the parish system's growth between then and the twelfth century, larger churches became more territorial in their organisation. Larger and older minsters, such as Hitchin, often became the centres of Deaneries in the new system and many churches had dependent chapelries.

There is a single medieval record of a park at Almshoe, dating from 26 July 1358, when Queen Mother Isabella and her daughter Joan, Queen Consort of Scotland, spent a day there. Two of the subdivisions of the manorial enclosure are named Great Park and Little Park, but these cannot represent its full extent. Anne Rowe has suggested that much of the medieval manor was emparked and has identified a boundary bank towards the north.

The parish church of St Hippolytus does not appear in the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*; the survival of eleventh-century masonry in the present structure shows that it, too, must have been regarded as a chapelry of Hitchin. The entry for Hitchin and its dependencies includes one for *Vicaria capelle de Dinesle*, usually assumed to be the chapel of the Knights Templar at Temple Dinsley. However, this was a preceptory and never a vicarage, so the reference must be to the church of St Hippolytus, part of Furnival Dinsley.
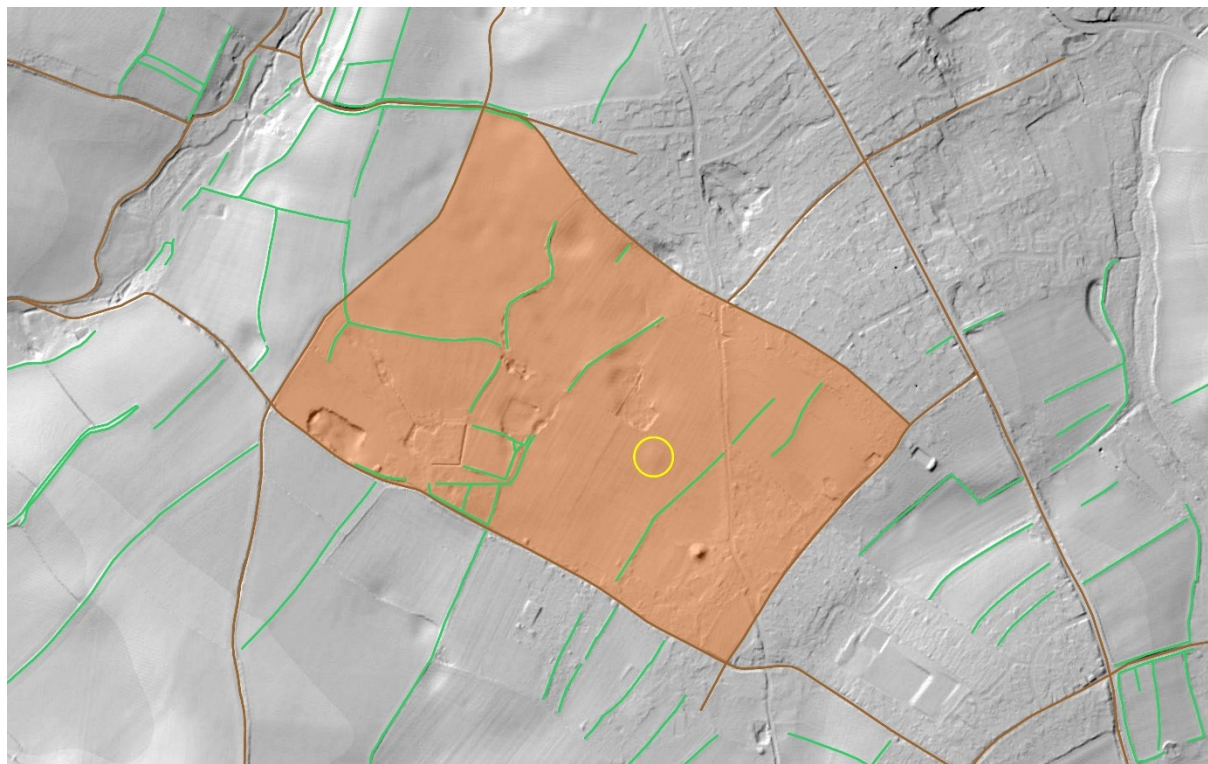

Figure 28 the park at Maydencroft reconstructed from Lidar

There is no information about when the village first developed as a community. The church may have been an isolated chapel to serve the regular moots at Sperberry (notionally held twelve times a year), around which a settlement later grew, or there may already have been a community (called Dinsley?) at the time the chapel was founded. Other than the church, none of the village centre buildings can be dated earlier than the seventeenth century. The Wyck is a sixteenth-century hall house in origin, but it lies a kilometre to the south-southeast of the church and is in Little Almshoe. The buildings in Gosmore are similar in date. This date range is not unusual for North Hertfordshire villages: earlier buildings were often made with cob (dried clay) walls and have not survived, while early timber-framed buildings, belonging to slightly more prosperous peasants, were replaced.

It was once suggested that Maydencroft was the site of a 'lost' village. However, the research of Bridget Howlett has shown this to be mistaken. It seems to have been established as an isolated house for the manor of Dinsley, built by the de Furnival family in the thirteenth century. The family name later came to identify this manor (Furnival Dinsley) as separate from that part donated to the Knights Templar about 1140 (hence the manor of Temple Dinsley). It was emparked at an unknown date before 27 July 1358, when Queen Isabella visited with her daughter Joan, a day after staying at Almshoe. Bridget Howlett's reconstruction of the extent of the park places it between Brick Kiln Lane to the north and Maydencroft Lane to the south. Banks survive in places on both these lanes to confirm these boundaries. The western edge follows the parish boundary and a lane now diverted westwards about halfway along its line. The eastern edge is more difficult to recognise. Bridget Howlett thought that it might have followed Gosmore Road, but Lidar shows that the northern boundary continued beyond

it and the present Mill Lane probably marks much of it on the east. There are traces of a bank on the northwestern side of the land, especially towards its southern end.

The community of Waylay straddled the parish boundary with the northwestern lobe of Preston parish at the western corner of St Ippollitts. The manor was considerable at the time of Domesday Book, with 3½ hides of arable served by ten ploughs, and woodland for 350 pigs; it was home to two freemen, ten villeins, six bordars and 12 cottars. These figures imply about 150 people, farming about 170 ha of arable, and about 210 ha of woodland. The boundaries in this area must date from a later time when Waylay had all but vanished.

Figure 29: Waylay Green, stradding the boundary between Preston to the west and St Ippollitts to the east

The site today consists of scrubby woodland, crossed by Tatmorehills Lane. Nineteenth-century maps show a second road to the site, running from Preston to the south. It seems to have turned west at Waylay Green to join the road running north from Sootfield Green to Offleyholes, both in Preston parish today but part of Hitchin until the 1890s. The name Offleyholes is not recorded before 1650 when it was part of the manor of Temple Dinsley. Part of the manor was formed from land worth £15 annually in *Wedelee* in 1147 as an addition to their first grant in 1140. Perhaps the land around Offleyholes and in the western part of St Ippollitts was the original Waylay, with Waylay Green near the centre of the territory.
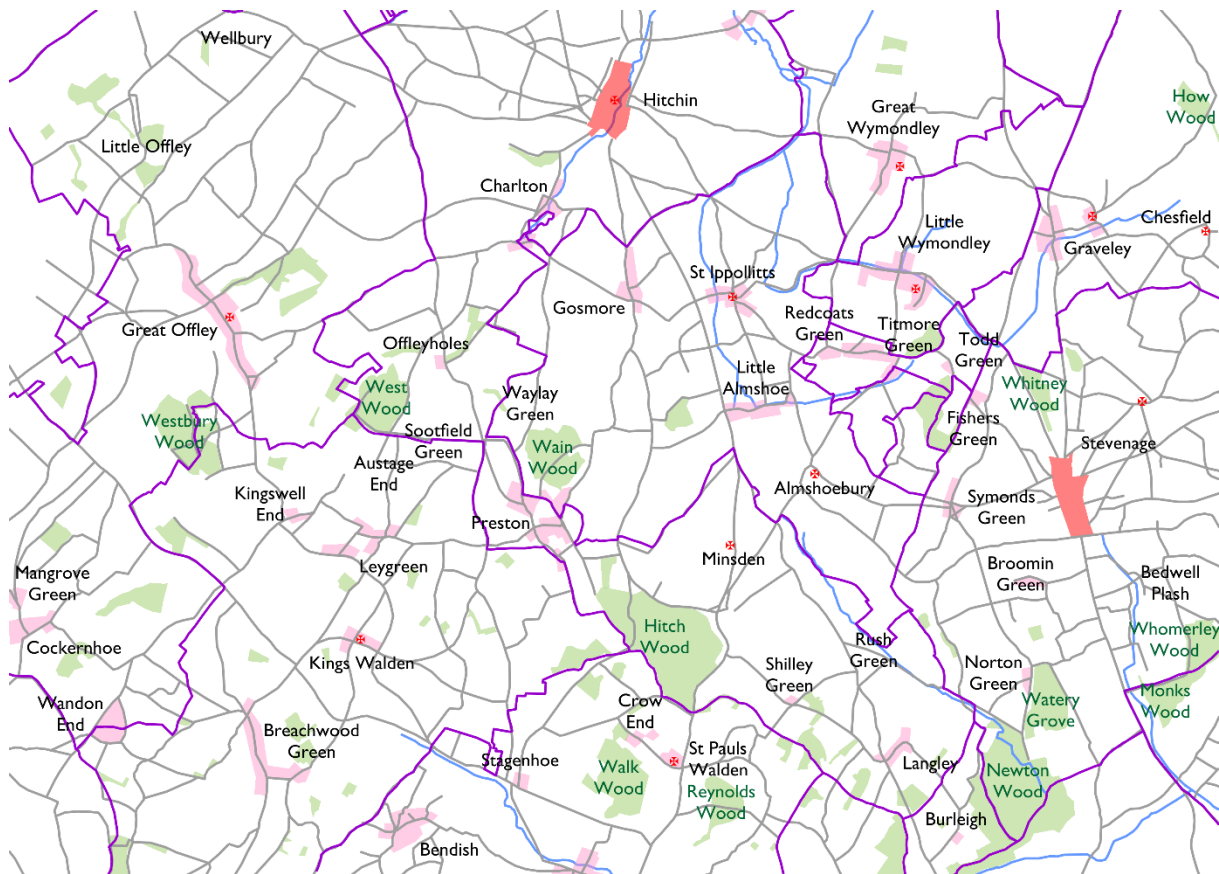
Figure 30: historic settlements around St Ippollitts: parish boundaries (purple) are shown about 1850, roads and the extent of settlements about 1766

Aerial photographs show a group of pits to the east of Waylay Green (HHER17253; Figure 29), which has been interpreted as a part of the settlement. They lie within St Ippollitts parish. Further south, there is a series of linear cropmarks, in Preston Parish, extending towards Wain Wood. They may represent a trackway whose course shifted over many years. Fieldwalking led by Nina Freebody of Preston in the mid-1980s recovered medieval pottery from north of Waylay Green (HER 9121). The finds were recorded in a note at Letchworth Museum submitted to the Medieval Settlement Research Group but not published in the newsletter.

The observations made here about the Domesday manors of *Welei*, *Deneslai* and *Almeshou* show that the parish organisation has undergone considerable change over the centuries. Parishes formed piecemeal between the ninth and twelfth centuries, often as the larger units served by minsters (*monasteria*) broke up when local landowners established proprietorial chapels. The minster at Hitchin continued to provide parochial functions for Preston and Langley until the end of the nineteenth century. However, we have seen how a chapel existed at Almshoe in the High Middle Ages and that St Hippolytus's church existed by the end of the eleventh century. The chapel at Minsden (serving the royal manor of *Menlesdene* in 1086) covered the southern part of the area, perhaps including the settlement at Preston. Waylay remains the only community not served by a church or chapel. Might one once have existed? If so, it was perhaps not at Waylay Green (the term 'Green' implies an outlying settlement) but somewhere such as Offleyholes.

By the time of the Lay Subsidy (an occasional tax on lay persons) of 1307, *Dynleye* was assessed as three separate manors: *Dynleye* proper, with a total of 47 householders who paid 75s 6d (perhaps lands now classed as St Ippollitts), *Dynesl' Fornival*, with 15 householders paying 26s ½d (perhaps Maydencroft and Gosmore), and *Dynesl' Templum*, with 17 householders, who paid 21s 10¼d (perhaps

Preston). In the Lay Subsidy of 1334, only two Dinsleys are named (*Dynesle Tempel et Dynesle Furnival*) together assessed at £8 12s 4¾d. The earlier tax was based on individual wealth, but a reform in 1332 simplified the liability to each borough and vill. Langley, which had appeared as a subdivision of the manor of Hitchin Foreign in 1302, was not accounted separately in 1334.

Any attempt to reconstruct the early estate organisation in and around St Ippollitts must recognise that the early manors refer either to places that no longer exist, never existed as nucleated villages or whose names have changed beyond recognition. We have seen that St Ippollitts was probably named Dinsley initially, while Almshoe can never have been more than a demesne farm and its dependent workers' homes. The early existence of Preston is attested in no early documents. Many of the communities south of Hitchin remained part of its parish until the late nineteenth century, and this surely confuses matters. Figure 30 shows the confusing nature of the parochial organisation and the scatter of dispersed hamlets across this landscape.
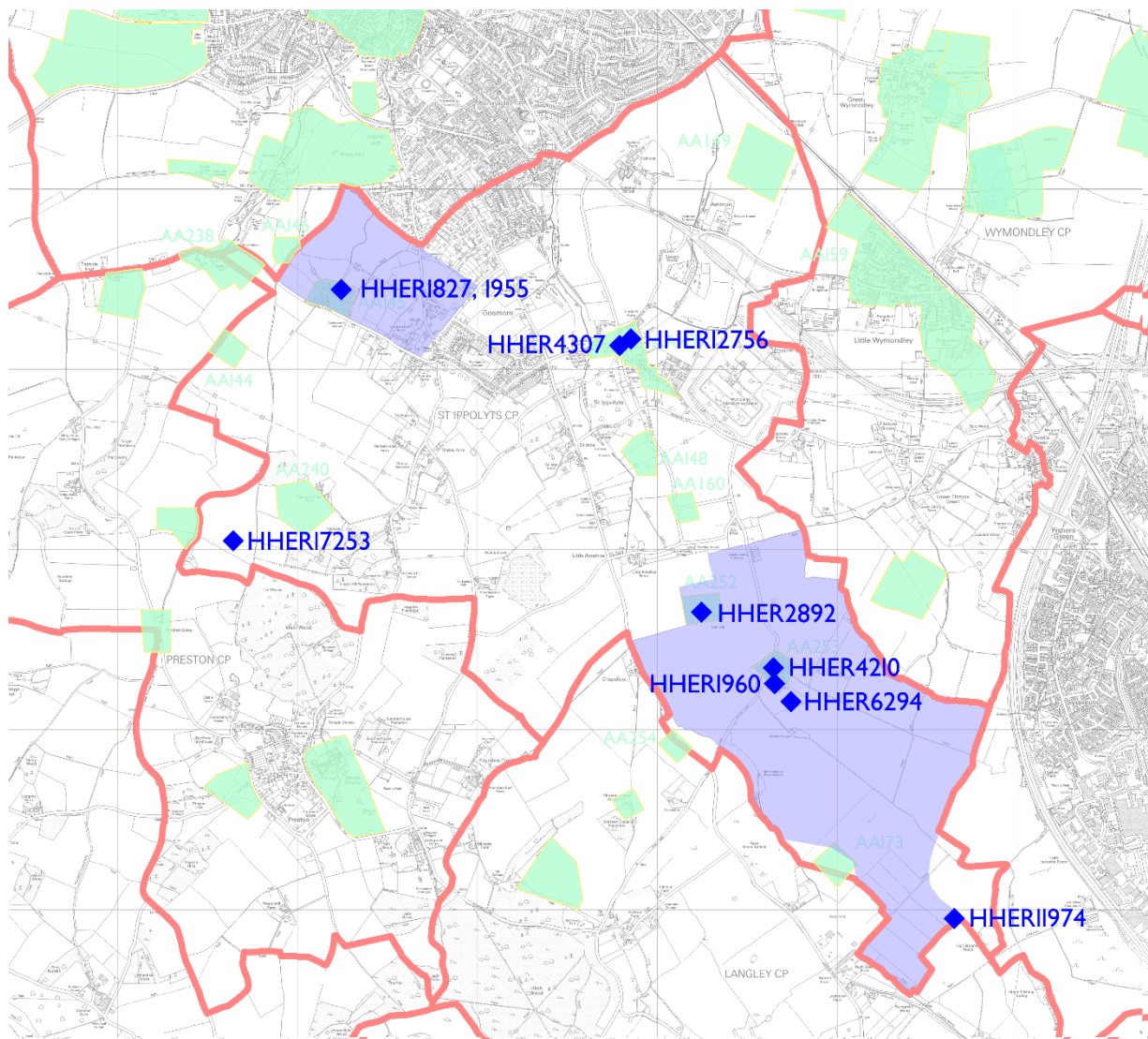

Figure 31: high medieval (c 900-1350) sites and finds in St Ippollitts; lilac blocks mark the hypothetical positions of the two medieval parks

A case can be made for regarding the northern part of what is now Preston parish, centred on Offleyholes, as the remnants of the estate of *Welei*, with Waylay Green an outlying settlement as discussed previously. Much of St Ippollitts was the estate of Dinsley, although discontinuous parts of the manor were given to the Knights Templar in the twelfth century. Much, if not all of Waylay also

became part of the Templars' holding. The principal unanswered question is the origin of Preston. Historians have generally taken the name as ancient: placenames ending with Old English *tūn* ('enclosed farmstead') seem to date from about 800 to 1100. They have seen it as referring to a source of revenue for priests at the *monasterium* in Hitchin. This explanation is plausible enough, but the community seems to have had no independent existence, like Charlton, another *tūn* name.

Reference	Description	NGR
HER 398	Early Saxon pottery vessel	TL 192258
HER 399	Coin of the Heptarchy	TL 15-25-
HER 1617	Early Saxon burial	TL 192274
HER 1827	Supposed 'deserted village', Maydencroft	RL 182274
HER 1955	Moated manor house, Maydencroft	TL 182274
HER 1960	Aisled hall house, Almshoebury	TL 206252
HER 2892	Site of windmill	TL 202256
HER 4210	Chapel, Almshoebury	TL 206253
HER 4307	Church of St Hippolytus	TL 197271
HER 6294	Deer park, Almshoebury	TL 207251
HER 11974	Enclosure	TL 216239
HER 12596	Sperberry, hundred moot	TL 197267
HER 12756	Medieval pottery	TL 198271
HER 17243	Pits from the settlement at *Welei*	TL 176260
PUB-922077	Cruciform brooch (late C5/early C6)	
BH-851446	Cut halfpenny of Henry III	
BH-EEA114	Late medieval buckle	
BH-1C648B	Double-loop buckle	
BH-1B638C	Double-loop buckle	
BH-7FBA10	Double-loop buckle	
BH-85F197	Lead bird feeder	
BH-AD6397	Double-oval buckle	
BH-E08757	C15 silver-gilt finger-ring	
PUB-BF41D4	Double-loop buckle	

Table 4: medieval sites and finds in St Ippollitts

Post-medieval

The later history of St Ippollitts has been well told in several publications, from the county histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to more recent books by local people. Much of the parish character is provided by buildings, walls, plantations, and roads of post-medieval origin, of which Listing protects many older examples. The main road south through Langley and Codicote was turnpiked in 1726, improving communications with London. By the 1830s, two mail coaches and four others used this road every day. The remining medieval open fields were inclosed by Act of Parliament in 1811, which probably led to many country lanes being straightened and widened. Many of the straight field boundaries in the modern landscape were created at this time. However, 981 ha (2424 acres) had already been enclosed before then, leaving only 170 ha (420½ acres) to be newly enclosed.

The community of St Ippollitts was never served by a railway, one of the principal agents of social and economic change during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead, Gosmore developed as a prosperous suburb of Hitchin, growing throughout this period. The rise of car ownership enabled the village to grow as a commuter community, some residents travelling to Hitchin or Stevenage before

taking the train to London. In some ways, this has helped the area retain a largely agricultural aspect, despite industrial-scale mineral extraction.

Table 5 summarises the listed buildings, monuments and finds that characterise the physical remains of the past four centuries and more. Dury and Andrews map of 1766 (Figure 2) and Bryant's map of 1822 (Figure 33) show how the layout of the village and its nearby hamlets have changed little in the past two hundred years.

Reference	Description	NGR
HER 317	Prospect mound (?)	TL 186272
HER 698	Former garden	TL 198270
HER 1959	Open hall house, The Wyck	TL 204261
HER 5302	Brick pillar wall letterbox	TL 197271
HER 5319	Postal lamp box	TL 185262
HER 5975	Windmill	TL 190275
HER 5976	Astronomical observatory	TL 193265
HER 6326	Richard Tristram's grave	TL 194281
HER 11050	Little Almshoe Farm	TL 199259
HER 1105	Lodge's Farm	TL 199272
HER 11052	Oakfield House/Kingshott School	TL 198280
HER 12156	Isaac's Forge, foundry	TL 195270
HER 12578	Culvert under railway embankment	TL 203287
HER 12756	Post-medieval and modern finds	TL 198271
HER 15094	Oakfield Farm, now Oakhurst	TL 198281
HER 15095	Pound Farm	TL 192274
HER 15096	Brookend Farm	TL 196271
HER 15097	Lodge's Farm stables	TL 199273
HER 15098	Peascod Hall	TL 196221
HER 15099	Little Almshoe Farm, barn	TL 198259
HER 15100	The Wyck, stables	TL 204261
HER 15101	Almshoebury, farm buildings	TL 206253
HER 15102	Thistley Farm	TL 187265
HER 15103	Avenue Farm	TL 187268
HER 15104	Maydencroft Manor, barn	TL 181273
HER 15105	Mill Farm, farm buildings	TL 189274
HER 15106	Sloe Hill	TL 190274
HER 15283	Maydencroft Manor, east wing	TL 181274
HER 15285	Tatmore Place, stables	TL 184260
HER 15290	The Old Bell House	TL 189279
HER 15293	Mill Farm	TL 189274
HER 15392	Lodge's Farm	TL 199271
HER 15435	Ashbrook stableyard	TL 202278
HER 15436	Vicarsgrove Farm	TL 190258
HER 15437	Hunters Gate Farm	TL 185266
HER 15438	Letchmore Farm	TL
HER 15653	Tile-making site	TL 182273
HER 15998	St Ibbs	TL 194266
HER 15999	St Ibbs Bush	TL 195266
HER 16000	Quaker burial ground	TL 195266

HER 17257	Soil marks of chalk pits and boundaries	TL 198276
HER 17856	Tatmore Place	TL 184260
HER 18304	Parkland at St Ibbs	TL 195268
HER 30308	New England House	TL 189277
HER 30561	Joyner's Folly	TL 200265
HER 30563	Chapel	TL 205260
HER 30713	Bridge over Ippollitts Brook	TL 195269
HER 31112	Park View	TL 198269
BH-1CA4E5	Lead token	
BH-7071E0	Lead token	
BH-1C3768	Double-loop buckle	
BH-7076F4	Lead token	
BH-1B7A0B	Strap fitting	
BH-7FD943	Double-oval buckle	
BH-945413	Lead cloth seal	
BH-9445B7	Lead cloth seal	
BH-93F964	Lead cloth seal	
BH-93D825	Lead cloth seal	
BH-443AF5	Silver groat of Elizabeth I	
BH-1C0717	Silver sixpence of Elizabeth I	
BH-939BE5	Lead cloth seal from Colchester	
BH-706944	Jeton of Hans Krauwinckel II	
BH-70C0D2	Double-loop buckle	
BH-70A8F4	Double-loop buckle	
BH-ABD9C2	Copper-alloy mount	
BH-943413	Lead cloth seal	
BH-EE1C6	Double-loop buckle	
BH-445D45	Silver half-groat of Charles I	
BH-705691	Silver shilling of Charles I	
BH-1B4BC3	Lead cloth seal	
BH-1B3A69	Lead cloth seal	
PUB-5AFE03	Double-looped buckle	
BH-1AFFE5	Copper-alloy token halfpenny of Edward Harrise of London	
BH-416342	Copper-alloy token farthing of Fran Field of Hitchin	
BH-EE6403	Copper alloy Irish half crown of James II	
BH-5BB3A4	Copper alloy circular coin weight of William III	
BH-42C492	Copper alloy farthing of William III and Mary II	

Table 5: post-medieval sites and finds in St Ippollitts

Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews

Figure 33: Bryant's map of 1822